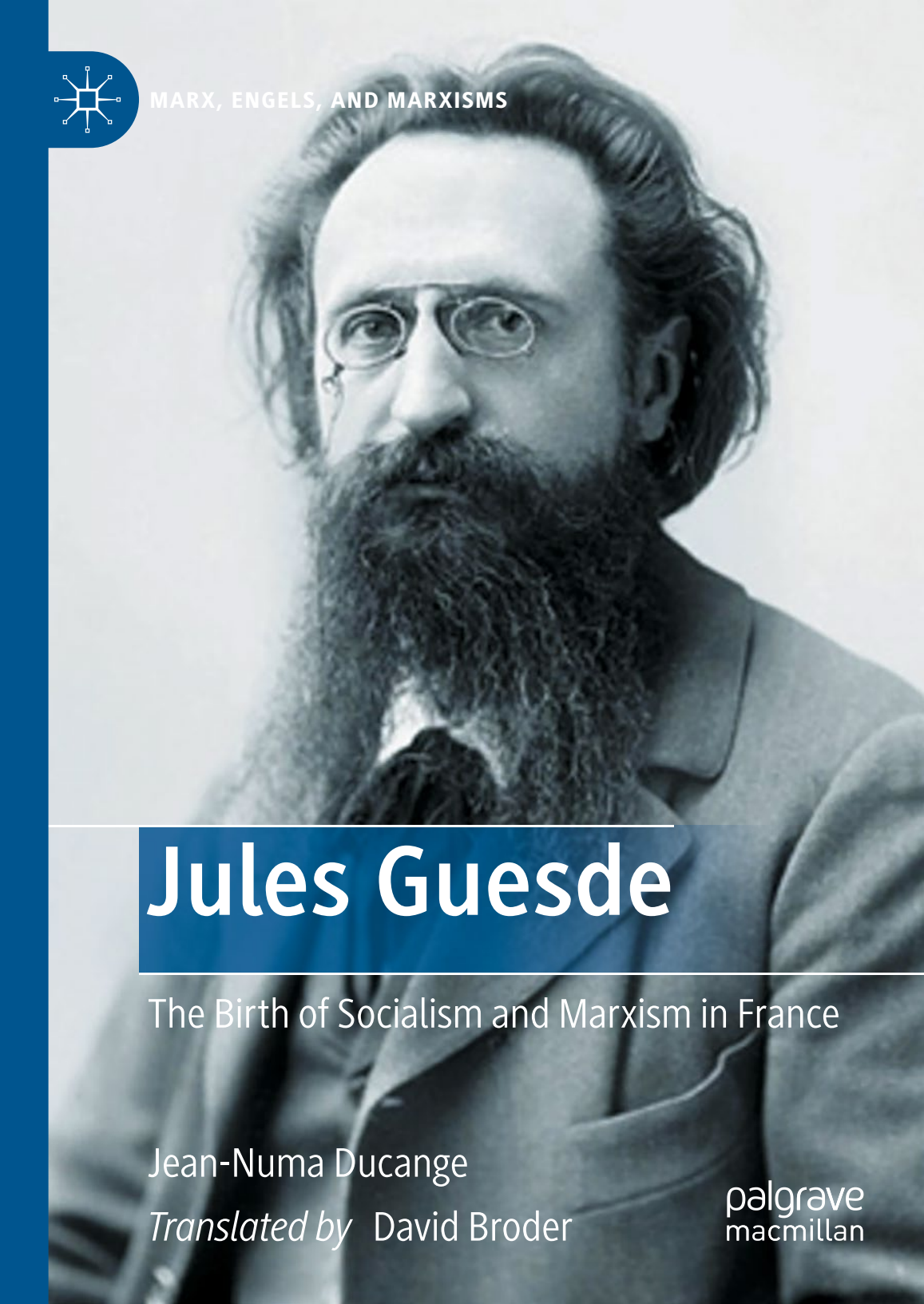


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Jules Guesde

The Birth of Socialism and Marxism in France

Jean-Numa Ducange

Translated by David Broder

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Jean-Numa Ducange
Department of History
University of Rouen
Mont-Saint-Aignan, France

Translated by
David Broder
Rome, Italy

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Preface

A Life Dedicated to Socialism

In June 2015 the Parti Socialiste held an extraordinary congress in Poitiers, three years after its candidate François Hollande had been elected president of the Republic. 'There has been a political clarification', declared Jean-Marie Le Guen, at that time Secretary of State for Relations with Parliament. Issuing an appeal not to 'get bogged down in debates' and arguing for 'government that confronts the real problems', this representative of the party majority added that 'there has always been a part of the French left that has not been able to embrace the idea of governing, of assuming responsibility'. Looking back to history, he contrasted Jean Jaurès, a socialist able to 'bring people together', to 'the sectarian Jules Guesde, the dogmatist who developed a constant critique of the Republic because it was not social enough'. Le Guen then set off on a more or less haphazard genealogy of the Left, in which Léon Blum was associated with Jaurès, and Guesde with Guy Mollet and his so-called Marxist intransigence. Also coming in for criticism were those Greek activists who challenged the ongoing retreats under their new Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras; they were accused of being the descendants of this same 'dogmatic sectarian'. Little mentioned, here—though directly in the firing line, in the context of the party congress—were dissidents within the Parti Socialiste who criticised the Hollande government's neoliberal orientation.[1]

[1] All citations from the intervention by Jean-Marie Le Guen—see the video of his speech at http://congres.parti-socialiste.fr

One year before this, the philosopher Vincent Peillon—a leader of the Parti Socialiste and former Minister of National Education—had written a piece in *Le Figaro*, marking the centenary of the assassination of Jean Jaurès.[2] Passing very sharp judgement on Jaurès, Peillon argued that 'the entire twentieth century, for [French] socialism, was to be dominated by this compromise by Jaurès—and we may well consider that this did not necessarily do the French Left any good'. But what 'compromise' was he referring to, here? The former minister explicitly attacked Jaurès for having built ties with Jules Guesde, the man with whom he had created the party back in 1905: 'If Marxist thought dominated over French thought … this was because Jaurès gave in to Jules Guesde over some doctrinal questions in order to obtain a united party'. Hence the problem, here, was less to do with the basics of Jaurès's own thought than with his alliance with Guesde—or more precisely, his 'compromises' with him.

We could find many such quotes: but we would struggle to find the slightest positive comment on Guesde in any of them. If many politicians—even on the Right and far right—seek to present themselves as loyal heirs to Jaurès, no one, even on the Left, wants to take any share of Guesde's legacy. A delegate at a socialist congress in 1905 or even 1914 would have had a hard time imagining that a century later there would be such an imbalance between Guesde and Jaurès!

So, what happened? To understand all this, we have to go beyond ideological anathemas and get to grips with the history of Guesde and what has been called 'Guesdism'—an oft-pejorative epithet which could sometimes still be heard on the French left even into the 1970s. To answer this question we need a specific study—if only to understand how and why such a major figure in the Left's history as Jaurès opted for an alliance with Guesde.

There are, however, many other reasons to take a deeper interest in Guesde's career. First, on the grounds that any more or less in-depth historical biography of Guesde's life was bound to be a first. This is, indeed, a peculiar case, given the countless number of biographies on the politicians of the Third Republic. There has been no genuinely historical biography of Guesde in French or in any other language—excluding, that is, a few flattering volumes by informed yet rather partial supporters of

[2] 'Vincent Peillon: "Le compromis jaurésien n'a pas nécessairement fait du bien à la gauche"', *Le Figaro*, 31 July 2014.

his.[3] Next to Jaurès—subject of a vast biography which we can consider definitive[4]—Guesde appears almost like an unknown, no matter how much leading politicians still mention him. In 1965 the historian Claude Willard, of Communist leanings, did publish a striking study on the Guesdist current[5]; Jacques Girault also took an interest in this same subject, paying more specific attention to Guesde's close acolyte Paul Lafargue. Tellingly, Lafargue—with Guesde had many differences—has drawn rather more attention. Karl Marx's son-in-law, this unabashed dandy and author of the charming *Right to Be Lazy*, who committed suicide together with his wife in 1911, is the subject of a fine and indeed sizeable two-volume biography published in the United States.[6] Among the trailblazers we have mentioned, in this regard, we could also cite Michelle Perrot. While few readers will probably know it, the initial research topic addressed by this great women's historian was the Guesdists and the problem of their relationship with Marxism.

Understanding Guesde in His Time

Let's say it straight out: there are, indeed, solid foundations for the popular trope that makes out Guesde to have been a 'sectarian' or 'dogmatist'—in large part explaining the lack of interest shown towards him. Among the pioneers who first introduced Marxism to France, Guesde also transformed it into an oft-simplistic catechism. During the Dreyfus affair he refused to join the *dreyfusard* side, for fear of drowning socialism in the bourgeois swamp. But if we emphasise only these aspects, we end up forgetting major historical facts, not least the immense, deep respect that many socialist militants and sympathisers felt for Guesde. They admired a peerless leader who also knew how to be caustic, a prodigious orator and talented populariser, a polemical journalist who was sometimes schematic

[3] Adéodat Compère-Morel, *Jules Guesde, le socialisme fait homme, 1845–1922*, Paris, Aristide Quillet, 1937. Alexandre Zévaès, *Jules Guesde 1845–1922*, Paris, Librairie Marcel Rivière, 1929.

[4] Gilles Candar, Vincent Duclert, *Jean Jaurès*, Paris, Fayard, 2014.

[5] The biography published by Claude Willard in 1991 contains some valuable insights but is barely a hundred pages long and overlooks many decisive aspects of Guesde's career. See Claude Willard, *Jules Guesde. L'apôtre et la loi*, Paris, Éditions ouvrières, 1991. On his other works (and those by Jacques Girault) see the bibliography.

[6] Leslie Derfler, *Paul Lafargue and the founding of French Marxism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991; *Paul Lafargue and the flowering of French Marxism, 1882–1911*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1998.

but formidably effective. A charismatic figure feared by his adversaries and respected both within and outside his party, Guesde's name cuts through a half-century of both French and international political life. He was in direct contact with Karl Marx and then the German social democrats—indeed, his adversaries long called him 'the Prussians' candidate!' But Guesde was also in the front rank as French socialism turned from being a loose set of modestly sized opposition groups into a great party of national importance. In his early years as a clandestine militant who was jailed on several occasions—indeed, one who intransigently set his face against the Republic—Guesde ultimately became a loyal minister, as the Union sacrée took form in 1914.

While Guesde initially adopted a rebellious and revolutionary attitude, he eventually enlisted to administer a state he had long condemned as 'bourgeois'—and, indeed, made this turn seemingly unconditionally. Such a career would have a hard time giving rise to any kind of revolutionary mythology. His choice not to follow the Bolsheviks in 1920 made Guesde's case even trickier. The most revolutionary would damn him for his betrayal, after he supported the Union sacrée in 1914; on the other hand, 'responsible' socialists took him as the very symbol of the refusal to govern. Was he incoherent? Weak-minded? Dogmatic? A capitulator? Perhaps. But these paradoxes themselves demand that we turn back to history itself, beyond the mere caricatures which have—successfully—been transmitted across several generations.

To take our distance from the historiography does not, of course, imply ignoring it. Logically enough, historiography does take up an important place in this volume. The reader will surely be surprised to discover that up till the 1960s Guesde remained a respected figure among the socialists and perhaps even more so among the communists, especially in Le Nord—the *département* which was both his happiest hunting-ground and the site of his electoral victories. MP for Roubaix across two decades, he was long one of the most emblematic representatives of this part of northern France. Before he was demoted—and even forgotten—Guesde was widely commemorated and celebrated, indeed sometimes even more so than his brother-enemy Jean Jaurès. And across several decades, the memory of Guesde blended with the history of the French left itself. To forget about him is to deny ourselves a unique route into history, one allowing us to understand how come Marxism left such a lasting mark on the rhetoric of several political parties.

Guesde, the First Guesdist

As well as being inextricably linked to his adoptive region, Guesde is similarly identified with the current that bears his name—Guesdism. This, too, is a peculiarity of his: hardly ever do we hear a mention of 'Jaurèsism'. Jaurès aroused a great deal of goodwill, but never brought together such a structured, hierarchically organised and particular current as Guesde did. The imprint left by Jaurès is a real and well-documented one, and it also seems more enduring—at least, over many decades far more claims have been made to Jaurès's legacy. Yet for half-a-century the 'Guesdists' occupied important positions in both socialist and communist ranks.

Guesdism left its mark on socialism in several regions. This implantation was itself the object of attention—or even a certain fascination—at a time when the question of Marxism and its French particularities occupied a growing historiographical space, in the course of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet following a certain eclipse during the 1980s, it has, instead, been the English-speaking world that has seen several remarkable studies on these same themes. These are welcome efforts—taking Guesde out of France is, indeed, a good means to break him away from internal-French debates alone. Indeed, Guesde made up part of a complex international game that ought to be reconstructed in all its rich development: himself a French politician, Guesde was at first an exile and, subsequently, forever on the cusp of multiple national spaces, not least thanks to his numerous contacts with the Germans. In overly 'nationalising' Guesde's career we lose sight of his significance to his European interlocutors, who knew him so well as a speaker at international congresses. This, too, is one of the goals of this book: to allow the reader to understand all the different dimensions of Guesde. This will help us see not only a politician anchored in France's own national logics but so, too, one who made up part of transnational dynamics which would, at first glance, be anything but self-evident.

There Were Many Guesdes

The representative of a recognisable current, Guesde however also embodied multiple different figures. Often in pain and long-enduring precarious conditions, at least for the first part of his life he can be identified with the kind of heroic gesture quite compatible with the socialist 'grand narratives' of the late nineteenth century. But he can also be seen as one of the 'proletaroid' intellectuals diagnosed by Max Weber. Unable to become

intellectuals with a recognised social position, such figures instead decided to make the revolution their life's work. This came at the cost of opportunistic political combinations that often neglected real reflection—a task that inspired distrust or even disdain. Guesde can, moreover, be taken for the traitor *par excellence*, as the man who both 'betrayed' socialism by rallying to the war effort in 1914 and then rejected the Bolsheviks' audacious move in 1917, instead preferring the *vieille maison* of the Parti Socialiste.

Yet Guesde was, in any case, a major figure, shaped by the experience of multiple struggles. These latter came along in a decisive period of France's history, as for the first time a Republic established itself in the long term. Tracing Guesde's activity offers us a front-row seat for the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the Paris Commune of 1871, the first French political parties and the divides resulting from the Dreyfus affair and the 1905 law on the separation of churches and state. His era was also the moment of the first social policy—sparking enthusiasm but also criticism in the workers' movement. Then came the terrible blow of what became a world war, the Bolshevik Revolution and, finally, the test of the division between socialists and communists—the last episode in Guesde's life, and one he experienced as a tragedy. Born in the Paris where Karl Marx was writing his first works and reaching the end of his life as the Civil War reached its conclusion in the young Soviet Russia, Guesde often himself played an important role in these various upheavals. Even as he did reach the end—ageing and unable to make public interventions—Guesde remained a confidant. Even now, he had the ear of militants who played major roles in the greatest crisis in the French left's history—the events of 1918–1920, which would forever separate socialists and communists. Strangely, very few have taken an interest in the final years of Guesde's life—indeed, it has usually been assumed that his position as a minister in a unity government simply and utterly discredited him. But taking our distance from such approaches, our concern has been to understand this man from top to bottom, examining the arguments which he himself put forward at each stage. To proceed in such a fashion does not at all imply any attempt to justify his actions. Yet to play down the final part of Guesde's life would be to deny ourselves an important key to understanding a decisive turning point in the history of socialism, which directly concerned the man himself.

An ambivalent figure, Guesde embodied distrust for the state and governmental power, a sincere commitment to the workers' cause and a frenetic activism that rejected theoretical inquiry as secondary or even pointless. For Jaurès, Guesde could be framed in terms of '[s]implicity of

conception, simplicity of tactics, simplicity of action'.[7] And, we could add, effective communication—something which explained his power of attraction even beyond the ranks of his own current. Pock-marked with often painful personal and private experiences, Guesde's whole life was directed towards politics and socialism. His close friend and first biographer Compère-Morel put it forcefully: Guesde was 'socialism made man'.

As well as closely linking Guesde to the current which he so centrally drove, writing a biography of such a figure also demands we look towards the kind of *Gesellschaftsbiographie* ('biography of society') envisaged by Siegfried Kracauer.[8] This also means avoiding the psychologising, ahistorical and unsociological approaches which many authors including Pierre Bourdieu have quite rightly warned against.[9]

In dialogue with one of his German colleagues, the famous historian of the *sans-culottes* Albert Soboul spoke of the possibility of a 'social biography', such as could cover the many actors in the revolutionary era. In Soboul's view, the role of a few great figures ought not eclipse the multiple social and political groups involved—of which these figures were, above all, the embodiment.[10] Perhaps Soboul's thinking is also a useful starting point for understanding what linked Guesde to his own time: he was an exceptional figure but cannot be detached from the many socialists and the multiple social and political upheavals of his era.

At a time when divisions on the Left were filling up the newspaper columns, it was time to restore to its proper place the career of a man still today regularly cited as the very emblem of sectarianism. For this is a man who remains very little understood. Here, then, is Jules Guesde—a whole life dedicated to socialism. A Guesde finally restored to history, outside of the myths and the stigma that have so long afflicted him.

Mont-Saint-Aignan, France Jean-Numa Ducange

[7] Jean Jaurès, *Préface aux discours parlementaires: Le socialisme et le radicalisme en 1885*, Paris, Édouard Cornély, 1904, p. 87.

[8] Siegfried Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach ou le secret du Second Empire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994 (1937).

[9] Pierre Bourdieu, 'L'illusion biographique', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 62–63, June 1986, pp. 69–72.

[10] Walter Markov, *Zwiesprache mit dem Jahrhundert, Dokumentiert von Thomas Grimm*, Berlin and Weimar, Aufbauverlag, 1989.

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For Roza, who is so considerate in every way, and without whom nothing would have been possible.

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CHAPTER 1

The Apostle of the Fourth Estate (1845–1880)

On 11 November 1845, Jules Bazile came into the world. He was born on the Rue de la Femme-sans-tête, later the Rue le Regrattier, on Paris's île Saint-Louis. He later chose to adopt his mother's surname; from November 1945, the street would thus bear a plaque commemorating the 'tireless theorist and apostle of socialism' Jules Guesde.

It did, indeed, take decades of 'tireless' battles for socialism to become a national political reality in France. What, after all, had 'socialism' meant back in 1845? Since the 1830s the adjective 'socialist' had designated a teeming array of doctrines that called for radical social change and aspired to a more egalitarian world. Fourier, Saint-Simon, Proudhon and, indeed, Louis Blanc, among many others, were its most eminent representatives in this period. It is impossible to understand their rise without grasping the intolerable destitution among the workers of this era, the result of the industrialisation of European societies. In his 1841 *Tableau de l'état physique et moral des ouvriers*, the doctor Villermé described the world this created:

> For these unfortunates, the fatigue of a working day already long beyond all proportion, a day of at least fifteen hours, is combined with that of travels back-and-forth as frequent as they are arduous. The result is that they reach home at night overwhelmed by the need for sleep, and the next morning head out again before they are completely rested, in order to make it to the workshop for opening time.[1]

[1] Villermé, *Tableau de l'état physique et moral des ouvriers*, Paris, 10/18, 1971 (1841), p. 34.

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The material conditions of the poorest were appalling. As Villermé continued 'In Mulhouse, in Dornach, from neighbouring houses I have seen these miserable lodgings where two families slept each in its own corner, on hay thrown on the tiles and supported by two planks of wood. All that lies over this hay are rags for a cover and a often a sort of feather mattress, of disgusting filthiness.' In a resounding speech to the National Assembly in 1851, Victor Hugo forever immortalised this early nineteenth-century destitution. Evoking the 'cellars of Lille', he cried:

> Imagine streets, whole streets, where at each step we come across these spectacles, where the most lamentable distress pulsates everywhere and in all forms. My fellow-travellers and I stayed but one day in Lille; I repeat, it was by chance that we stumbled into these luckless districts; we entered the first houses we passed. Well! We did not even half-open a door without finding destitution, sometimes agony, behind it.[2]

It was in these lands of the working-class North that Guesde's socialism would sink lasting roots some four decades later. But when we take the moment in which Hugo gave his speech, we are still far from the development of the organisations of the 1880s–1890s, which history has long remembered as 'the workers' movement'. So, when did this movement really begin? This is itself a point of controversy: recent historiography has included the first cooperative and guild forms of the early nineteenth century, which had previously been neglected and looked down upon, much like the bold conceptual sallies of the first socialisms of this era.[3] We can grasp the essential point by following the British historian Eric Hobsbawm, when he said that 'The labour movement provided an answer to the poor man's cry'.[4] To put an end to working-class destitution: thus could be summarised the shared objective of the many socialist theorists of the 1840s–1860s.

France's head of government in this era, François Guizot—a brilliant intellectual who has been attributed the famous line 'enrich yourselves by work and savings'—had no intention of allowing these subversive

[2] Victor Hugo, 'Les Caves de Lille', 1851. See Victor Hugo, *Détruire la misère et les caves de Lille*, Paris, D'ores et déjà, 2013.

[3] François Jarrige and Emmanuel Fureix, *La modernité désenchantée. Relire l'histoire du XIXe siècle français*, Paris, La Découverte, 2015.

[4] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848*, New York, Vintage Books, 1996, p. 209.

movements and doctrines to prosper. Indeed, he repressed them unceremoniously. For instance, a few months before Guesde's birth, the government ordered the expulsion of one of the many German émigrés who had come to Paris and been won to socialist ideas: a certain Karl Marx, at that time known only to the initiated. Three years later, an oppositional campaign resulted in a spectacular return to the barricades, in February 1848. The last monarchy in French history gave way to the Second French Republic: this latter aroused many hopes, but they were rapidly swept away by the terrible clashes in June. The insurgent workers who rose up to demand a social republic were harshly repressed, indeed by a republican general, Cavaignac. Returning to Paris before he was again expelled, Marx described this moment as the 'first great battle between the two classes of modern society'. For him, as for many socialists, there was no doubt: June 1848 showed that the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat represented the great problem of the nineteenth century.

After June 1848, the socialists' hopes dissipated, giving way to the redoubtable Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte. His skill for manoeuvre allowed him to re-establish the Empire of his illustrious uncle Napoleon I, himself taking the name Napoleon III. Clear-sighted about the developments of his time and exploiting the confusion among categories with some panache, the new emperor even managed to reconcile part of the socialist-inflected working-class circles to his own rule: although Proudhon was the first theorist of anarchism, at first he, too, was tempted by this adventure.

Jules Bazile grew up amidst this troubled political context. He was not a son of the people, the child of a working-class family immersed in destitution. Rather, his father, born in 1809, had come from Picardy to Paris and taught at a religious school in Passy—a *commune* that was not integrated into the capital until 1860. His mother, a Catholic from Nièvre, was a primary school teacher. Both were practicing Catholics. This was, indeed, a pious family if ever there was one: their five children were baptised and one of Jules's sisters even entered an order as a nun. The family lived modestly, but its lifestyle was quite distinct from the destitution then experienced by much of France. Jules, who passed his baccalaureate aged 16, rapidly embraced republican convictions. A whole generation grew up in opposition to Napoleon III's regime: these militants were inspired by the memory of the Revolution and the Republic, as they dreamed of doing away with the reign of 'Napoleon le Petit'. Again, this sobriquet for the Emperor owed to Victor Hugo. The young Guesde, who spent his days at the Bibliothèque Impériale reading books of philosophy and politics,

greatly admired this writer, an emblematic figure of the opposition to Napoleon III. No other work marked the young Guesde more than Hugo's *Les Châtiments* ['Castigations'], a collection of satirical poems that lampooned imperial power. 'I became a republican under the Empire, secretly reading Victor Hugo's *Les Châtiments*', Guesde would claim in 1893.[5] Such readings left an enduring mark: in the twilight of his life in the early 1920s, Guesde would still recite entire pages of Hugo's verse to those close to him. He shared this reference point with a whole generation: for instance, Gustave Rouanet, born in 1855, the son of an outlaw under the Second Empire and himself a future socialist MP for Paris's 18th arrondissement, had also learned by heart the 'iron verses' taken from *Les Châtiments*.[6]

Seeking to salve his family's material troubles, from age 19 Jules took up a series of administrative posts at the Seine police prefecture and the Ministry of the Interior. He then took the plunge by throwing himself into political journalism. In a context where calling oneself a republican entailed major risks, he took his mother's surname in order to avoid seeing his father punished in his place. An oppositional left-republican, the young Parisian wrote for multiple newspapers. The militant journalist Jules Guesde was born. And his passion for politics would never leave him.

The Montpellier Radical

Guesde acquired a solid experience as a journalist, first of all working for the Paris, Bordeaux and Toulouse press. He soon made his name known thanks to his lively writing style. It was in Montpellier that he finally decided to make his home in July 1869; he remained there until June 1871. A journalist at *La liberté de l'Hérault*, he would especially devote himself to *Les droits de l'homme*.

A fierce republican opponent of the Empire,[7] his freedom of tone soon forced his resignation from *La liberté*. More lasting—and interesting—were his commitments at *Les droits de l'homme*, which he helped found on

[5] 'M. Jules Guesde', *Le Matin*, 2 November 1893. We shall not otherwise give footnote references for citations from newspapers if the title, publication and date are explicitly mentioned in the text.

[6] Étienne Rouannet, 'Gustave Rouanet, un publiciste et parlementaire socialiste face à l'émergence de l'antisémitisme français (1885–1895)', *Cahiers Jaurès*, 3/2016, pp. 57–84.

[7] Francis Arzalier, 'Trois ans de journalisme militant en Languedoc: Jules Guesde à Montpellier', *Cahiers d'histoire de l'Institut de recherche marxiste*, no. 26, 1986, pp. 49–74.

27 April 1870, as secretary to the editorial board. Here he rubbed shoulders with a medicine student—a certain Paul Brousse—who a decade later became one of his adversaries. Guesde affirmed himself as an ardent republican who supported major structural reforms. There was nothing very original about his ideas, which coincided with the concerns of many republicans: he defended the idea of national sovereignty against any return to the monarchy, sought increased civil liberties, and called for the separation of churches and state. Conversely, he said very little about economic questions. The few considerations we can find, in this regard, concerned the association among producers. At most, in some texts we can detect a certain Proudhonian inspiration—hence a somewhat anarchist bent, but which was on some occasions more statist. In these latter cases, Guesde drew closer to the ideas elaborated in *l'Organisation du travail*, a work by Louis Blanc, for whom cooperatives would necessarily rely on state support. Moreover, *Les droits de l'homme* also received some rather revealing messages of sympathy. Louis Blanc—at that time one of the most visible socialist theorists—himself addressed a letter to Guesde on 1 June 1870, lyrically saluting the existence of such a paper: 'The idea of yours to publish a newspaper directed by men of the people, with the people's savings and in the interest of the people, is a noble one. I associate myself with it, from the depths of my soul.'[8] Guesde on occasion even defended members of the International Workingmen's Association founded in 1864, which brought together the various anarchist and socialist sensibilities of the era. But he acted as a sincere republican democrat attached to public freedoms, not as a convinced socialist.

Above all, like all republicans in this period Guesde was an ardent patriot. France had to pursue its universal destiny, heralded by the French Revolution of 1789. After the terrible defeat against Prussia at Sedan—a death sentence for Napoleon III's regime—Guesde vigorously mobilised to defend the young Government of National Defence born of the proclamation of the Republic on 4 September 1870. Already on the following day, the 5th, he was at the head of a demonstration in Montpellier which proclaimed the Republic. The day after that, he published an ardent call for mobilisation in his newspaper: 'So arise and to arms, no longer like a

Francis Arzalier, 'Jules Guesde à Montpellier (1869–1871)', *Études héraultaises*, 1987, pp. 107–112.

[8] IISG Amsterdam, Jules Guesde archives (henceforth, IISG J. G.). Letter from Louis Blanc to the founders of *Les Droits de l'Homme*, 18 June 1870.

month ago, in a dynastic interest, for the greater glory of a counterfeit Caesar, like the gladiators in the circus, but as free men, as citizens of a country that has come back into its own possession, for the defence of our reconquered freedoms and our invaded territory'.[9]

Guesde became one of the organisers of the popular movement for national defence in Montpellier. For several days he 'continued to sound the alarm in favour of the Republic and national defence'.[10] In October he warmly saluted Gambetta, in whom he at first placed his full confidence. But the movement fell back from January 1871, faced with a series of defeats. He now founded a section of the 'Parisian Republican Alliance', while a National Assembly elected by universal (male) suffrage gave a large majority to conservatives hostile to the Republic and in favour of peace. But many inhabitants of the capital animated by socialist ideas refused to lay down their arms. On 18 March the Paris Commune was proclaimed. Guesde learned of the news, but it had no real impact where he himself was active. As in most provincial centres, nothing concrete developed, though in neighbouring Narbonne an ephemeral Commune emerged in solidarity with the one in the capital. The information that reached Guesde thus remained very partial. At this time Guesde still defended the libertarians' 'associationist' ideals, as against the excesses of the Commune.

The violent repression of the Communards made Guesde change his tone, as he showed increasing sympathy towards them. For Guesde, 18 March 1871 was the continuation of the patriotism expressed on 4 September 1870 and the pursuit of 'defence to the last'. In April 1871 he was enraged at the idea that the French army might repress the Commune: 'What the Prussians have not dared to do—which is to say, attack the city walls with canons, force a way through, and unleash a column drunk on gunpowder and the blood of the French through this breach, against a part-disarmed population—the Versaillais are now going to do'.[11] The Communards were the authentic patriots, faced with traitors.

The *patrie* above all else: up to this point Guesde remained 'little impassioned by the social and economic problem'.[12] Yet the sympathies he had expressed for the Commune during May 1871 were not without

[9] *Les Droits de l'Homme*, no. 96, 6 September 1870.

[10] Adéodat Compère-Morel, *Jules Guesde, le socialisme fait homme 1845–1922*, Paris, Aristide Quillet, 1937, p. 39.

[11] *Les Droits de l'Homme*, 19 April 1871.

[12] Adéodat Compère-Morel, op. cit., p. 83.

consequence. Like many others, Guesde would pay for his solidarity, himself becoming a victim of the repression that now struck across the whole of France. A few weeks after the terrible repression—the famous *semaine sanglante* ('bloody week') in which thousands of Communards were executed—on 22 June 1871, Guesde was condemned to five years' imprisonment and a 4000 franc fine. What were the charges against him? Many things: attacks and offences against the National Assembly, an attack on popular sovereignty, whipping up hatred and contempt for the government, apology for deeds qualified as crimes, incitement to civil war and so on. Guesde had decisively swung onto the side of the enemies of the new order, an order which accepted the Republic only in words and moreover despised the whole '*la Sociale*' with which the Commune identified. After June 1848, for many socialists and anarchists May 1871 confirmed the rupture between the working-class and bourgeois worlds: the two had now become irreconcilable. A lasting distrust towards the Republic now took hold: in 1871, as in 1848, was it not 'republicans' who had massacred the insurgents? Jules Guesde would soon become one of the most manifest incarnations of this disillusionment with the 'bourgeois Republic'.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves: Guesde had not yet converted to socialism, while still in Montpellier. He had, nonetheless, even now shown great qualities which had already made him an important political figure. A leader of men, he was also a popular tribune able to enliven public meetings. A report by the Montpellier Procureur général (magistracy) described Guesde as both dangerous and cunning: 'Guesde heads out into the countryside preaching civil war among citizens whose ignorance, more than their bad instincts, sometimes makes them sympathetic to him'.[13] His other decisive asset was his pen—his great capacity to publish short and effective texts, notably incisive editorials. A talented political journalist and an exceptional speaker: all of Guesde was already there. These traits of his were also noted by the authorities. A report, dated 22 July 1871, addressed by the special commissioner for Ain to the Interior Ministry, described Guesde as a 'man dangerous for the violence and exaltation that he affects in his speeches'.[14]

[13] Report by the Procureur général of Montpellier, 19 April 1871 cited by François Arzalier, art. cit., p. 53.

[14] AN, F7/15965. Report from the special commissioner for Ain to the Interior Minister, 22 July 1871.

The Exiled Anarchist

It was no accident that he was tracked down in the Ain *département*, on the border with Switzerland. Why should he respect the legality of a state that carried out massacres? Guesde refused to see out his sentence in France. So, at twenty-six years of age he fled to Switzerland, where he encountered former members of the Commune. It was here that the great phalanx of the 'century of the exiled' had arrived.[15] The Commune had left a great mark on Guesde: indeed, this was a major event in his life, the memory of which he would regularly invoke. In Switzerland, Guesde published the *Red Book of Rural Justice*, an homage to the Communards, directed against the Versaillais.[16] This was a very peculiar volume in which Guesde himself said little. Rather, the book brought together many newspaper articles from the conservative press, relating the massacres of the Communards. A real anthology of the bourgeois Versaillais' hatred, this large format *livre rouge*—sometimes making for a difficult read—collected twenty-four pages of articles denouncing the 'crimes' of the Communards with inexhaustible ardour. So why publish this? 'This is, in reality, Versailles's judgement on Versailles, the rural majority painted and narrated by itself', Guesde insisted. For the former republican journalist, there was no doubt: 'The condemnation of them, and its full and entire justification, comes out of their own account itself'. The Commune showed the centrality of the confrontation between the classes. Peter Kropotkin said of this book: 'I believe that I have never suffered as much as when reading the terrible book entitled *Le livre rouge de la justice rurale*'.[17]

Twenty years later, Guesde continued to insist on what he saw as the importance of the Commune. This event had definitively turned him towards socialism: 'Through the Commune, I became a socialist'.[18] This was, however, a largely retrospective view of things: indeed, at first, having reached Switzerland, Guesde founded an ephemeral newspaper, *Le Réveil international*, which was still republican and not socialist. Then, during

[15] Sylvie Aprile, *Le siècle des exilés. Bannis et proscrits de 1789 à la Commune*, Paris, CNRS, 2010.

[16] Jules Guesde, *Le Livre rouge de la Justice rurale: documents pour servir à l'histoire d'une République sans Républicains*, Geneva, Imprimerie Blanchard, 1871.

[17] Pierre Kropotkine, *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire. Autour d'une vie*, Paris, Éditions du Félin, 2008 (1899), p. 292.

[18] 'M. Jules Guesde', *Le Matin*, art. cit.

his stay in Geneva, he drew closer to the anarchists. Here he discovered—for the first time, in the flesh—the International founded in 1864, which had then been torn apart by the opposition between 'Bakuninists', the anarchist partisans of Bakunin, and the 'Marxist' partisans of Marx. The adjective 'Marxist'—with which Guesde would remain historically associated—was born of this opposition, as the result of the stigmatisation of 'Marxism' by its adversaries.[19] Nonetheless, Guesde distinguished himself in this era as one of Marx's most virulent critics. He went on to meet with many exiles, for instance the Communard Benoît Malon; at this time, he shared Malon's hardened opposition to the General Council in London held by Marx and his partisans.

How about where Guesde stood from an ideological standpoint? If we believe the memoirs of the anarchist James Guillaume, still at the end of 1871 he remained 'a simple advanced radical journalist who had put articles sympathetic to the Paris Commune in a local newspaper in the Midi'.[20] Guillaume often recalled Guesde's 'Jacobin statements' from the time, which were far from socialist and still less anarchist. Yet in September 1871 Guesde took part in the creation of a 'revolutionary socialist section for propaganda and action' bringing together the Swiss delegates of the International, which he represented at the Sonvilier congress. This congress decided on the foundation of the Jura Federation, which would play a decisive role in the history of anarchism. In the name of the congress, Guesde drafted the manifesto against Marx and the General Council in London, denouncing its 'dictatorship' and calling for a 'free federation of autonomous groups'. Guesde seems to have become radically anarchist, and did not mince his words in opposing the 'Marxists'. Subsequently, however, he would forever minimise this period of his life—which the anarchists were themselves eager to remind him of, as they did on many occasions!

Around the same time, Guesde contracted a painful congestion of the lungs, which, in addition to other ills (including bronchitis and nervous illnesses), poisoned his personal life and regularly forced him to cancel his rallies, or even disappear from the political stage for several weeks at a time. Similar portraits of Guesde have followed one after another,

[19] Georges Haupt, 'De Marx au marxisme' in *L'historien et le mouvement social*, Paris, Maspero, 1980, pp. 77–107.

[20] James Guillaume, *Documents et Souvenirs (1864–1878)*, 1905 cited by Alexandre Zévaès, *Jules Guesde 1845–1922*, Paris, Librairie Marcel Rivière, 1929, p. 18.

portraying him as a sickly, suffering, fragile man. The extraordinary energy of a rally could give way to him laying low for several weeks or even months, before an oft-spectacular and sometimes surprise return. What condition was Guesde in? Would he come to the rally, or to the congress? Later, to the socialist party leadership, or indeed, the Chamber? The papers regularly reported rumours regarding the health of the 'apostle'. Each time Guesde returned—and all the more so after a long absence—it had a theatrical dimension, especially when these reappearances came at congresses decisive for the history of socialism.

For now, sick and without fixed income, Guesde was forced to leave Switzerland in April 1872 and head to Italy. He was closely followed, from one country to another, by the French authorities. A report from 10 May 1873 even noted a plan to move to Barcelona, where he apparently hoped to found a new paper. Another report characterised him as still 'very dangerous'. Having arrived in Italy, after a little back and forth he helped found a new section of the International in Rome. Here, Guesde gave French classes and occasionally contributed to various newspapers in order to earn his living. He was still a fervid partisan of anarchism. He published some articles typical of this current, including some particularly hostile to universal suffrage. For example, Guesde argued that 'nothing is sadder and more inexplicable than the charm that universal suffrage still today exercises over the working class as a whole'.[21] For him, it was nothing but a tool in the hands of the bourgeois: 'In the age of property qualifications the bourgeoisie was a high-command without an army. Universal suffrage provided it the electoral army it needed to maintain itself in power.' Such hostility may seem surprising, yet was anything but exceptional among the far-left currents of this era. Was it not through universal suffrage that Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte had reached power in December 1848? The revolutionary Blanqui considered that in 1848 the people still platooned by the Catholic Church was not yet mature to vote. As for the anarchists, to whom Guesde was then close, they saw it as only a means to put the people to sleep and divert it from its true objectives.

Still being pursued by the law, he then moved to Milan. Here he was less politically active, and spent many days reading. He consulted works on the Enlightenment or indeed those by the first communists, notably Théodore Dézamy, one of the 'neo-Babeuvians' of the first half of the nineteenth century, standing for collective property and basing itself on a strictly materialist

[21] *Almanach du peuple*, 1873 (Saint-Imier, Jura) (unpaginated).

analysis. Guesde had particular admiration for Chernyshevsky's novel *What is to Be Done?* (1861), whose title another political exile—a certain Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better-known as Lenin—would later adopt in 1902 as he expounded his conception of the party. An attentive reading of this novel allows us to understand the heroic and sacrificial conception of militancy that Guesde must have had at the time. The Russian social-democrat Plekhanov, a future correspondent of Jules, put this in very clear terms:

> Who has not read and reread this famous book? Who has not undergone its attraction and beneficial influence, who has not been purified, improved, fortified, emboldened by it? … Who, after reading this book, has not reflected on his own life, not subjected his own aspirations and inclinations to rigorous examination? From this book we drew moral strength and faith in a better future.[22]

Guesde's ethos was, indeed, that of a professional revolutionary who feared neither exile, persecution, poverty, hunger or the illnesses that so besieged him. From this period, he drew a tenacity which would impress his adversaries. As for his socialist comrades—some of whom passed unencumbered through the Republic's *grandes écoles* without encountering the least persecution—at decisive moments of history he could remind them who he was and from whence he came. His exile journey made up part of his legend.

In these precarious conditions, Guesde started a family. A man of friendship and loyalty, Guesde was also able to show his sensitive side: he was a family man. He married Mathilde Constantini, daughter of a soldier for Napoleon who had stayed in Italy. Mathilde had been to Russia, to give Italian classes to young Russian aristocrats. She allegedly even had a first marriage with a Russian. A polyglot, she mastered five languages (Italian, French, English, German, Russian), which would sometimes ease Guesde's own contacts with socialists abroad. They went on to have three children together—Mario, Louise and Léo. But their father's engagements soon earned the family a fresh expulsion from the national territory. Guesde again made it to Switzerland, where he and his family stayed for some months. He then waited for his five year sentence in France to run out, after which the statute of limitations would apply. After a last abortive attempt to emigrate to Argentina together with a Communard, he finally returned to France.

[22] Jean-Jacques Marie, introduction to Lenin, *Que Faire?*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, p. 23.

The Author of a New Catechism

In 1876, then, Guesde headed back to Paris. He was traced and closely followed by the authorities, with many reports giving account of his intensive activity as a militant. He held many public meetings where he presented his 'catechism'. The socialism of this period embraced the analogy with the Church, which it sought to dislodge from its central place in the French population's everyday life. The date of his *Essai de catéchisme socialiste* is open to controversy: indeed, it seems that it was written in Italy, and more particularly in Milan, before it was first published in Brussels in 1878. It went on to have multiple French editions.[23] The whole of Guesde—or almost all of him—was already present in this catechism. Short and sharp phrases denounced capitalism and the exploitation of workers and called for the overthrow of the system in order to make way for an egalitarian world. Here, he forcefully asserted the promise of future happiness; a form of messianic utopia imbued his whole line of argument. Far from a zealous statist, Guesde was still impregnated with the phraseology he had deployed in Switzerland and Italy, defending libertarian plans for education which would be independent of organisation by the state. Distrust towards the repressive bourgeois state was, indeed, common currency at the time. His propaganda called upon dreams and the imagination. It is no exaggeration to see, in this, the continuation of the 'utopian socialists' of the first half of the nineteenth century. For now weakly imbued with the conceptions of Marx, with which he was not acquainted—Volume I of *Capital* had just been translated into French and published by Lachâtre, but he had not yet read it[24]—Guesde had however fully grasped the enthusiasm that the socialism 'of the new times' could inspire. His utopia, moored to a peerless 'demonstrative rigour',[25] rapidly assured him a solid reputation among socialist currents.

It is worth saying that the France of 1876 was far more industrial than that of the 1850s. Indeed, that was what the spectacular investments of the Second Empire had gone into. Doubtless, the country did remain mostly rural, but industrial regions had already clearly developed. The

[23] Jules Guesde, *Essai de catéchisme socialiste*, Brussels, Librairie socialiste d'Henri Kistemaeckers, 1878.

[24] Maurice Dommanget, *L'introduction du marxisme en France*, Lausanne, Éditions rencontre, 1969.

[25] Claude Willard, *Le Mouvement socialiste en France (1893–1905). Les guesdistes*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 1965, p. 131.

areas with concentrations of mining and metalworks had grown considerably. And hence for the most optimistic socialists, capitalism seemed to have run its course: the banking crisis of 1873 brought a series of bankruptcies and put an end to the economic growth that had begun in the 1850s. However, this was also a context in which socialist organisations and structures were in difficulty, after the failure of the International Workingmen's Association, which had de facto dissolved in 1872. In October 1876 a first workers' congress with over 300 delegates was held in Lyons, with the backing of the radical republicans. Bringing together a great variety of bodies, the congress pushed moderate political solutions, in a context where the 'moral order' of the very-barely republican president Mac Mahon still reigned. The idea of cooperation dominated; there was manifest hostility towards strikes, and revolutionary upheavals were no longer the order of the day.

The Newspaper: L'Égalité

The year following this congress, in 1877 Jules Guesde founded a new weekly paper named after the most 'socialistic' term of the republican motto 'Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood'. The first issue of *l'Égalité* appeared on 18 November of that year, with Guesde as editor in chief. After multiple back-and-forths and repeated bans, in 1885 *l'Égalité* adopted the name *Le Socialiste*. At first the editorial team met in the Café Soufflet, right in the heart of the Latin Quarter. One of the main driving forces was Gabriel Deville, a key figure in the early years of what would soon be named the Guesdist current. Marx's son-in-law Paul Lafargue also played a decisive role therein, but a little later, from 1880 onward. Guesde had got in touch with him the previous year. Born to French parents in Santiago de Cuba in 1842, Lafargue was himself a professional revolutionary, standing for a very class-struggle-focused socialism loosely inspired by Marx. He had married the daughter of the teacher of 'scientific socialism', Laura, when he was in London after his expulsion from France; for this reason, he very quickly accrued a significant international web of contacts. Lafargue became inseparable from Guesde, especially on account of his role in driving *l'Égalité/Le Socialiste*. Up until his death in 1911 he and Guesde formed a duo, which went through both high and low points.

Despite many difficulties, the creation of *l'Égalité* did mark a turning point. It was one of the titles that most edified Guesde's name, contributing to his reputation and then his legend: he had founded the first socialist

paper on French soil to be imbued with Marxist theories—or as they were called at the time, 'collectivist' theories. The term 'collectivist' was employed at the time in clear reference to the critique of private ownership of large companies, which ought to give way to collective ownership by workers. For more than a century, the grand narrative of the introduction of 'scientific socialism' or of the birth of Marxism in France has devoted a special place to this newspaper. The early research by the historian Michelle Perrot in the 1960s was devoted to it[26]; in the 1970s—in a move that was exceptional for the time—the Parti Communist Français (PCF) embarked upon a full reprint of *l'Égalité/Le Socialiste* in six large-format volumes.[27]

Such an emphatic evaluation of *l'Égalité*'s impact resulted from a retrospective and rather ideological interpretation—in truth, the paper had the greatest of difficulties in achieving any real distribution. But certainly for the cadres of the socialist movement now in gestation, this paper really did count, and constituted the first organ of what is habitually termed the 'Guesdist' current. In an October 1877 prospectus the paper was presented as follows: '*L'Égalité* will be republican because the Republic is the last word in purely political or governmental evolution. … But above all *l'Égalité* will be socialist, this economic revolution being its direct goal.'[28] On 2 June 1878 Guesde published in its pages a merciless portrait of Voltaire, celebrated by republicans a century after his death. Taking one's distance from republican mythology, critiquing its hypocrisy, and above all demonstrating the necessarily central class conflict: such were the means by which socialism would have to take root. One month later, on 14 July 1878, *l'Égalité* was condemned for 'apologias for deeds qualified as crimes' and handed a hefty fine, which led to its first disappearance. The second series of the journal, beginning in January 1880, was no longer advertised as a 'socialist republican periodical' but clearly as a 'revolutionary collectivist organ'. Now was no longer the time for compromise—rather, it was time for the intransigent critique of the bourgeois Republic.

Through this paper, Guesde earned himself his credentials with Marx and Engels. The paper's readership would remain very small, but in historical terms this was the first regularly-appearing periodical that gave vent to a Marxist sensibility. Here, one could regularly read short extracts of

[26] Michelle Perrot, 'Le premier journal marxiste français: *L'Égalité* de J. Guesde (1877–1883)', *L'Actualité de l'Histoire*, no. 28, July–September 1959, pp. 1–26.

[27] Published by Éditions 'Hier et aujourd'hui'.

[28] N F7 12/488, presentation of *L'Égalité*.

texts by Marx, Engels and other similarly-aligned socialists. It would also be reductive to present this as nothing but a propaganda organ, though this was doubtless its foremost characteristic. *L'Égalité* and then *Le Socialiste* published articles on history, and in particular the episodes of June 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1871, heroising the working-class combatants who had died in the struggle. But they also offered portraits of older figures (Thomas More, Campanella, Fourier, etc.) in the interests of popular education. Indeed, one of the markers of what soon became called 'Guesdism' was already clearly shining through, here: a simplistic analysis of the social world, analysing current political events using rigid, mechanistic historical and economic schemas, enlivened by portraits and heroic figures presented as examples to follow.

Though it celebrated popular struggles throughout history, the paper was far from driven by workers alone. Indeed, the profile of the figures behind it is also worth emphasising: it largely brought together non-proletarian intellectuals, starting with Guesde and Lafargue. As Marie Ymonet has underlined in a piece on the post-1871 invention of Marxism in France, Guesde and those around him forged their identity on the basis of a dual exclusion.[29] Not integrated into the classic political field, which perceived them as idealist doctrinaires, nor did they have any position in the university or any other institution. Their reference to Marxism, or rather to a few formulations that encapsulated Marxism, served as a specific tool of legitimation which allowed them to transcend this dual obstacle, revolutionary rhetoric being fully compatible with their own excluded situation. But we should be wary of falling into determinism, here—after all, far from all the individuals who happened to be in Guesde's situation would ever join socialist ranks. Nonetheless, it is clear that this situation, standing outside of any institutional sphere, does in part explain Guesde's personal choices and his quest for a specific legitimacy.

Foreign Associations and Assistance

Among the socialist currents of the era, internationalism and the International constituted a major means of legitimation for whoever aspired to become a leader. A socialist had to be internationalist in words; but to translate internationalism into deeds made it possible to obtain influence

[29] Marie Ymonet, 'Les héritiers du Capital', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, November 1984, pp. 3–14.

and recognition. *L'Égalité*, which would never have seen the light of day if it were not for the intellectual and material aid brought by German socialist intellectuals, constitutes a perfect example of this transnational dimension of the beginnings of organised socialism. *L'Égalité* could draw on a series of correspondents abroad, notably two German social-democrats close to Marx's conceptions, namely Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel. Its closeness with the young German social democracy (united at the Gotha Congress in 1875) is worth underlining: this latter would be a decisive and enduring influence on Guesde, who long saw it as the model to imitate.

For him, alliance between French and Germans was of primary importance. The revanchist French republican school was drilling its children to take back Alsace and Lorraine; the collectivists fought in a quite different perspective, namely the alliance of the workers of the two nations. Liebknecht and Bebel had opposed the Franco-Prussian war and expressed their solidarity with the Paris Commune. In return, the French socialists greeted the efforts of German social democracy, whose foremost thinker, Karl Marx, was in exile in London.

Karl Hirsch—a German emigrant residing in Paris—provided the on-the-ground link with Guesde.[30] Born in 1841, Hirsch was initially a partisan of Ferdinand Lassalle's before drawing closer to Wilhelm Liebknecht. Falling victim to the political persecution waged by the German government, by 1874 at the latest he had moved to France, following his expulsion from Belgium. He provided important information on the French political situation to his German comrades, including Marx. He regularly met with Guesde and considered him an interlocutor of the greatest importance. Hirsch was, moreover, the intermediary for the German social-democrat Karl Höchberg, who provided the 4000 franc deposit for the printer of *l'Égalité*, without which the paper would not have been able to get up and running. This financial consideration was thus decisive, but this cooperation moreover placed Guesde at the heart of international socialism, through his collaboration with the German social-democratic press. For example, in the year *l'Égalité* was founded, 1877, one question cut through the debates among socialists: was it necessary to defend a Republic now led by the reactionary Mac Mahon? Many Germans despised this 'bourgeois Republic' which had betrayed its promises; the memory of the Commune was still vivid. But Hirsch, who was clearly well informed, wrote to Liebknecht in

[30] Jutta Seidel, *Deutsche Sozialdemokratie und Parti Ouvrier 1879–1899*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1982, pp. 40–41.

order to warn him against overly radical slogans that risked cutting off the socialists from the working-class masses: 'The proletariat of each country knows best who its enemies are, and in particular the combatants of May-June 1871, who all today defend the Republic, *without exception*'.[31] And it was Guesde whom Hirsch asked for an article for the new German socialist review *Die Zukunft* ('The Future'). Hirsch considered Guesde the most reliable French socialist and warmly recommended him to Liebknecht. The first issue of *Die Zukunft* published a translation of an article by Guesde on '16 May 1877 and the French socialists'. The crisis of 16 May revealed the significant frailties of the republican regime: in sacking the prime minister, Mac Mahon had unleashed a major political crisis. The republicans were up in arms, but also united—and they provoked fresh elections, which went in their favour. Should the socialists remain alien to this battle? No, Guesde replied: 'The Republic is a first important stage'. Even though they did not fetishise the Republic, the socialists had no interest in its overthrow. Guesde's contribution drew widespread comments and critiques: indeed, this was the first episode in a long debate on the nature of the republican regime, which he would never truly resolve decisively. Having started out from fierce opposition to the bourgeois Republic, here he lined up—however minimally—among the defenders of this regime once it was endangered. He would continue to oscillate between these two positions.

Hirsch sent a series of missives to Marx and Engels on the development of *l'Égalité*. This prompted a regular series of translations of political articles in the French periodical, often concerning current affairs and, more rarely, theoretical matters. 'The good will is already there' despite the shortcomings and the 'anarchist errors' of the first issues, he wrote to Marx on 6 February 1878.[32] When Henri Oriol founded a socialist library that same month, Hirsch actively participated in its creation, in liaison with the German social democracy. This latter directly supported the initiative by sending books and pamphlets to translate.[33] These efforts nonetheless seem to have had little real follow-up, and the library had only a limited echo. But the will was indeed there: it speaks to the attachment of those close to Guesde to distributing pamphlets in order to convince workers of socialist ideas.

[31] Carl Hirsch to Wilhelm Liebknecht, 26 July 1877, in Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel mit deutschen Sozialdemokraten 1862–1878*, Assen, Van Gorcum 1973, vol. 1, p. 753.

[32] RGASPI (Moscow), 1, 5 (Marx-Engels papers), no. 3879.

[33] Many police prefecture reports relate such links: Archives de la Préfecture de Police (APP), Ba 1470 'Bibliothèque socialiste'.

Many militants who rubbed shoulders with Guesde, as well as a long historical tradition, logically concluded that Karl Hirsch was the key figure who had convinced Guesde of Marxist theses with which he had hitherto been very poorly acquainted. Such a claim does have some foundations. But when, much later, Guesde himself revisited his 'conversion' to Marxism in 1910, he spoke of his two first 'brothers in arms': Karl Hirsch, but also José Mesa.[34] According to the socialist Gabriel Deville's account, Mesa was 'the first Marxist in touch with theory'[35] around Guesde, and even more important than Hirsch. This Spanish socialist incontestably played a major role in Guesde's career. Born in Spain in 1831, Mesa was a fashion journalist before he turned his hand to politics. Probably taking refuge in France from 1865, and a member of the International Workingmen's Association's Federal Council, he was active in taking the fight to the anarchists who were then dominant in Spain. Mesa led the internal opposition together with Pablo Iglesias (future founder of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español) in the name of the 'Marxists'. In October 1872, Friedrich Engels saw Mesa as 'by far the most superior man we have in Spain'.[36] Paul Lafargue, who was exiled in Spain for a period starting in August 1871, played an important role in the fight against anarchist influence. Their combined efforts did not, however, manage to reverse the trend: the nascent Spanish workers' movement remained strongly imbued with anarchism. Mesa thus left Spain, embittered, and after a detour via London he made his home in Paris, while also maintaining contacts with Iglesias. He translated several of Marx's works into Spanish. It was probably at this point that Guesde began to make Mesa's acquaintance. For want of specific sources it is hard to say much more on this, but many accounts are in agreement on their relationship. According to Deville, it was Mesa who put the extracts of *Capital* Volume I, published in several parts between 1872 and 1875, into Guesde's hands. He seemingly then played an important intermediary role, in 1882 organising meetings between Marx and several French socialists including Guesde.[37]

[34] Jules Guesde, 'Le banquet du Socialisme', *Le Socialisme*, 23 July 1910.

[35] 30 April 1936 letter from Gabriel Deville to Maurice Dommanget cited in Maurice Dommanget, op. cit., p. 134.

[36] Friedrich Engels, 'Bericht an den Generalrat der Internationalen Arbeiterassoziation über die Lage der Assoziation in Spanien, Portugal und Italien' in Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1973, vol. 18, p. 186.

[37] Jean-Louis Gerena states that 'this was also the year in which, in the company of Guesde, Lafargue and Deville, he met Marx in Paris at least three times. Mesa was thus fully engaged

Birth of the Parti Ouvrier

In parallel to these contacts, plans advanced for a new political party. This party probably constitutes Guesde's most enduring contribution to the political history of contemporary France, more precisely through his contribution to elaborating its program. But the path that led to the Parti Ouvrier's first successes would still be a long one. Repression against the socialists was raging throughout Europe. In Germany, in 1878, Chancellor Bismarck had the first banning laws passed which outlawed the greater part of the Social Democrats' activities. On 24 October that same year, in France, Guesde appeared before Paris's 10th Correctional Tribunal: he was arrested in the street for having tried to organise an international workers' congress on the occasion of the Universal Exhibition. The verdict: six months in prison and a 200 franc fine. Appearing before the Tribunal, Guesde proudly admitted to the choices he had made, and emphatically spoke up for the 'social revolution':

> Yes, we are among those who pursue a social revolution, among those who believe a workers' [17]89 both necessary and inevitable. And do you know why that is, gentlemen? Because we can stand before today's society with the same charge-sheet that was once formulated against the *ancien régime* by the Third Estate; and because in support of the demands of the Fourth Estate, we can invoke the same arguments, the same rights, invoked by the Third in support of its demands 91 years ago.[38]

He drove the point home by dismantling the accusation of 'subversion' levelled against him: were the first revolutionaries of 1789, to whom the present Republic laid claim, not themselves 'subversives'? Guesde could make his case no better than by appealing to the very principles with which the regime itself identified. He published his defence speech under the title 'Le collectivisme devant la 10e Chambre'. Guesde excelled in this type of rejoinders, transforming his answers to his adversaries' accusations into mighty propaganda weapons, published in the form of small pamphlets. Among these, we could also cite his *La loi des salaires et ses*

alongside his French friends'. Jean-Louis Gerena, 'Un socialiste espagnol en France: José Mesa et L'Égalite de Jules Guesde', *Études hispaniques* II, Travaux de l'Institut d'études hispaniques et portugaises de l'Université de Tours, Publications de l'Université de Tours, 1979, pp. 103–122.

[38] Adéodat Compère-Morel, op. cit., p. 132.

consequences, published for the first time shortly before his trial in September 1878. In this text he asserted 'the need, the absolute necessity for today's proletarians … to break out of wage-labour just as they broke out of slavery and serfdom'. Guesde considered that under capitalism, the 'iron law' of wages applied to the majority: 'the average wage will not normally exceed the necessary subsistence line … such as allows the worker to live and reproduce himself'.[39] While dear to Ferdinand Lassalle, this iron law contracted the theory of value Marx had defined in *Capital*, which Guesde had either not mastered or did not wish to foreground.

Thus sentenced, Guesde was imprisoned in the Sainte-Pélagie jail where a whole lineage of prestigious revolutionaries (Blanqui, Raspail, Vallès, etc.) had been locked up before him. Not at all discouraged, he continued to write. His *Le collectivisme par la revolution* was written in early 1879 after his transfer to the Necker hospital for health reasons. In this text he insisted on the need for the 'socialisation of the means of production' and lyrically heralded the disappearance of 'idleness, both mother and daughter of the exploitation of man by man; and, with idleness, … the spectacle of that wealth that stands outside labour and well-being, and of that consumption without an equivalent in production.'[40] Revolution was the means for establishing a harmonious society that would 'meld all classes into just one, the class of workers, in whose service the whole set of productive capitals must be arraigned'.[41] Again, immediate demands came side-by-side with the prophesy of a better world, promising a land of milk and honey under the socialist system.

Having come out of prison, Guesde was ready for battle—and impressing already. His very particular physique allied to his talents as a speaker regularly led to contradictory portraits of this figure, an enlightened prophet who had come to preach the socialist work with vigour. Here, for example, is how the *Revue du movement social* described him in 1880:

> A man of average size, and thin. He has long dark chestnut hair, and a great beard of the same colour. A pince-nez perched on his nose when he speaks completes this physiognomy. His way of dressing does not scream wealth. … His voice, clear and metallic, vibrates like a clarion on the battlefield; his

[39] Jules Guesde, *La Loi des salaires et ses conséquences*, Paris, 1879 (in the A. Carbillet edition, 1881), pp. 3–4.

[40] Cited in Jules Guesde, *Textes choisis 1867–1882*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 1959, p. 98.

[41] Ibid., p. 102.

> eloquence is compelling. He gesticulates as he speaks and leans on the podium, as if to magnetise the room; he expresses himself in clear language, of scientific tone, but at the same time poetic and vivid.[42]

'The Immortal Congress' of 1879

The objective was clear: a society freed of exploitation, a radiant future established on new and egalitarian bases. But Guesde wanted to go beyond dreaming and act politically in the conditions of his time. Before one could envisage a better world, it was necessary, more prosaically, to begin by rallying together the dispersed phalanxes of the multiple socialist sects, in the perspective of preparing the revolution. This was the stated objective of the third workers' congress, which entered history as the 'immortal congress'—an expression of Guesde's that went on to be adopted much more broadly.

The congress began in Marseilles on 20 October 1879, marking the beginning of the long history of the Parti Socialiste—for the moment branded the Parti Ouvrier ('Workers' Party'). It brought together 130 delegates from 45 different towns and was listened to by an audience of around 2000, in a city where socialist groups had been pullulating for some years. The congress hall was decorated with slogans written on the walls, from 'Liberté, Égalité, Solidarité' to 'No responsibilities without rights, no rights without responsibilities', or 'Science, peace, justice'. The congress received multiple messages of greetings, for example from the German social-democrats or, indeed, from the Communard refugees abroad; these contributions were enthusiastically welcomed with stormy applause.

Writing on the eightieth anniversary of this event in 1959, the historian Claude Willard stated that 'This congress oriented the workers' movement along the path of scientific socialism'.[43] Adding greater nuance, he would write another twenty years later that the new party was, above all, 'an all-embracing *auberge espagnole*'.[44] Either characterisation is, without doubt, rather over the top, but it is clear that diversity reigned, here, from the radical republicans to mutualists, anarchists and socialists of various

[42] *Revue du mouvement social*, July 1880, cited by Georges Lefranc, *Le mouvement socialiste sous la Troisième République*, Paris, Payot, 1977, p. 38.

[43] Preface to Jules Guesde, *Textes choisis* (…), p. 24.

[44] Claude Willard, *La naissance du Parti ouvrier français*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 1981, p. 17.

different schools. Guesde was ill and could not make it to Marseilles. But he was in contact with militants close to him, especially Jean Lombard and Eugène Fournière. When he could not be present at a congress, Guesde arranged to send lieutenants of his who would effectively execute his will. He very early on understood the need for a devoted entourage of what we would today call 'aides' and 'spokespersons'. A charismatic figure, despite many fallings-out Guesde always managed to rebuild a team of loyal supporters; this was, without doubt, one of the reasons for his extraordinary political longevity.

Returning to the congress itself, historians have tended to maintain that the 1879 congress marked the birth of the first Marxist workers' party.[45] Was this a 'Marxist Party'? This is, in part, a claim made with the benefit of hindsight: a great variety of grassroots structures founded this still-fragmentary 'party'. All the same, it is worth noting the presence of delegates who came from the big industrial areas, which served as the future bases of socialism of a Guesdist stamp. This was a very real development, and one that was now taking off compared to the previous congress. 'Collectivist' rhetoric occupied an essential place in many speeches as well as in the texts that were passed. The Marseilles congress was thus marked by a sharply 'collectivist' tone.

The final declaration affirmed that the 'collective appropriation of all the instruments of labour and forces of production must be pursued by all possible means'. But the young party's membership numbers remained very modest: only a few thousand people signed up for this 'federation of the socialist workers of France', broken down into six largely autonomous regions (Paris, Lyons, Bordeaux, Marseilles, Lille and Algiers). To summarise, we can adopt the words used by historian Daniel Ligou: Marseilles 'renounced "cooperativism", rallied to collectivism, and organised the French Socialist Party'.[46] Therein lay its incontestable historical importance.

The First Programme

A reflection of the congress's diversity, and above all its multiple oscillations and uncertainties, it did not decree any definitive programme. Even so, its resolutions already contained a clear message centred on the social

[45] On this congress, see Emmanuel Jousse, *Les hommes révoltés. Histoire du réformisme en France*, Paris, Fayard, 2017.

[46] Daniel Ligou, *Histoire du socialisme en France* (1871–1961), Paris, PUF, 1962, p. 35.

question and the class struggle. It was Guesde who was entrusted to take care of drawing up its specific programme. To this end, he headed to London to meet Karl Marx, with whom he had already entered into contact via mail at the end of 1878, and especially in March–April 1879. Claiming, in a letter to Marx a few months before the Marseilles Congress, that he had 'always professed the liveliest admiration for the author of the *Manifesto of the Communists* [sic] and *Capital*' (which is, at least, an exaggeration!), Guesde revealed his immediate objectives: 'Cut the cable which still holds our workers back in the waters of bourgeois Jacobinism or radicalism, and show them the hollowness of amiable or peaceful solutions (cooperation, banks, etc.); that had to be and has been our double plan, today fully on the road to success.'[47] With these few lines, breaking with his own republican and anarchist past, Guesde sketched out his orientation: namely, to distance himself from the bourgeois republicans in order to form a workers' party independent of all others. He had a doughty ally in this struggle: Paul Lafargue, together with whom he discussed the programme with Marx in London, where he headed in May 1880.

Who ultimately wrote the programme? It is hard to say. Tradition—backed up by several accounts—reports that the points in the programme came from Karl Marx's hand, but there is nothing about them very specific to him. Posterity has tended to play down the role of the Communard Benoît Malon, given his later opposition to Marxist theses. But the guidelines of this programme were developed by this latter, as well, even if he ultimately did not make it to London. Guesde was close to Malon at this time: in a letter from 14 September 1879 we learn that he was looking after Guesde's son Mario because the father was ill. Yet differences were already coming to light: in a missive of 5 June 1879, Malon called on the rest to draw inspiration from the 'incontestable data of experimental socialism' and presented himself as the 'pacifist documenter' who complemented Guesde, 'the flaming sword of the party'.[48] Moreover, Malon—passing through Zurich—met the German social-democrats whose exiled high command had just taken up residency in the Swiss city; he told Guesde of his great admiration for the German organisation.

[47] Letter from Guesde to Marx, mid-April 1879, in *La naissance du parti ouvrier* … p. 44.

[48] For more on this episode, see Marc Vuillemier's pieces in Claude Latta, Marc Vuilleumier et Gérard Gâcon (eds.), *Du Forez à la Revue Socialiste. Benoît Malon (1841–1893). Réévaluations d'un itinéraire militant et d'une œuvre fondatrice*, Saint-Étienne, Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2000.

If Malon's role is worth underlining, ultimately the task of writing the economic and political demands elaborated therein—the minimum programme—seems to have been Guesde's work. The often-harsh Marx expressed his satisfaction with the results, even though he emphasised that 'With the exception of some trivialities which Guesde found it necessary to throw to the French workers. … It was a tremendous step forward to pull the French workers down to earth from their fog of phraseology, and therefore it was a violent shock to all the French giddy-heads, who live by "fog-making".'[49] This acknowledgement ought not be surprising: since 1848 had distrusted the insurrectionary incantations of the French, in his view very much based on grand rhetoric not followed up by actions. What use was it to have a glorious revolutionary tradition, if the French could not manage to found a united socialist party as in Germany?

Ultimately the programme mixed together very diverse influences. It of course had Marxist aspects (with the goal of collective ownership of the means of production) but it also advanced anti-centralising ideas such as the notion that each Commune should handle its own administration and police. The essential thing lay elsewhere, however: the programme insisted that the workers should, most importantly, constitute a distinct political party and carry out the revolution. It is worth noting that Guesde had watered down his line on universal suffrage: it was now called on to be transformed into an instrument of 'emancipation', having hitherto only been 'deception'. Lastly, this was the first programme in which woman was recognised as man's equal. In far from advanced terms, some would say. Yet it is important to remember what the political conditions in the France of the 1880s were: and this was the first programme to demand equal political rights but also economic equality at a time in which many republicans—and indeed, socialists—shared tenacious, 'well-reasoned' and openly embraced prejudices towards women. For the first time, a political organisation proclaimed that purely political emancipation would not suffice, insisting that economic liberation was also indispensable. This was Guesde's major contribution to the history of feminism.[50] The involvement of Hubertine Auclert—a tireless fighter for women's right to vote—at the Marseilles congress was an important turning point in this regard.

[49] Marx to Friedrich Adolph Sorge, 5 December 1880, text from marxists.org

[50] Charles Sowerwine, *Les femmes et le socialisme*, Paris, Presses deSciencesPo, 1978. Robert Stuart, 'Gendered Labour in the Ideological Discourse of French Marxism: the Parti Ouvrier Français 1882–1905', *Gender and History*, 1/1997, pp. 107–129.

The Parti Ouvrier programme ratified by the Le Havre congress in November 1880 was bathed in a uniquely mythological aura, from which Guesde would himself benefit. His partisans would unfailingly recall this episode each time their 'teacher's' legacy was challenged or criticised. The first programme of 'Marxist' inspiration, it had received Marx's personal endorsement, and Jules Guesde had been in the vanguard of its elaboration. Nothing could ever wipe away this phase, which granted Guesde a first-rank place in the heroic saga of Marxism such as it was developed over the first decades of the twentieth century. This process was also facilitated by the eclipse of Malon, whose glorious past as a Communard ought to have put him centre-stage: indeed, Malon's rapid moves to distance himself from any Marxist sensibility enduringly cast him aside as a historical figure. As for Lafargue—a poor speaker, brilliant but often irascible—he would have struggled to challenge the political place occupied by Guesde.

At the time, this prestige was far from self-evident. Marx was not ever so well-known, and most importantly he was a German. Nothing could have done more to drive distrust in the highly revanchist France that followed the defeat of 1870. Moreover, in July 1880 the now-republican Republic voted for an amnesty for the Communards: all those who had been imprisoned after 1871 were freed. Many returned to politics, but this paradoxically rendered even more complex the situation of a socialist movement that was far from united. In this context, the top objective for Guesde was fully to establish his own legitimacy and pass from the status of chief of one tendency to outright leader of the French workers' movement. He was convinced that he alone could unite the various socialist tendencies. Yet bitter battles between them were now looming.

Check for updates

CHAPTER 2

‘The Genius for Simplification’: Guesde, Founder of France’s First Socialist Party (1880–1893)

After negotiating the different aspects of the programme together with Marx and Engels, Guesde mounted the podium alongside some of the most respected figures of the nineteenth-century workers’ movement. On 27 September 1880, he held a rally in Reims together with a living legend, Auguste Blanqui, the rebel who had made every government since the 1830s tremble. A few months later, in March 1882 he made his way to Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing for a series of public talks alongside Louise Michel, symbol of the Paris Commune.

A tireless speaker, formidable polemicist and master of congress manoeuvres, Guesde threw himself into a new adventure—building the first workers’ party. To his eyes, this task was a priority. The main means of achieving it? Repeating the ‘line’ and doctrine, sometimes *ad nauseam*. Schematic sometimes to the point of excess, Guesde should not, however, be caricatured. As Jean Jaurès put it, he ‘had the genius for simplification’.[1] Fierce, caustic and sometimes humorous, his interventions were also real short courses in socialism, of undoubted effectiveness. One of the most verbose figures of this period, Guesde elaborated his ideas in numerous articles and pamphlets. He also built up an important web of contacts with the greatest figures of international socialism, in particular in Germany. Despite his many difficulties, within a decade he had managed to cohere the most identifiable socialist current—if not the most innovative—in all French political life.

[1] Jean Jaurès, *Préface aux discours parlementaires. Le socialisme et le radicalisme en 1885*, Paris, Cornély, 1904, p. 86.

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Towards a New Party

The new party's programme still had only a weak impact on working-class France itself. At the start of the 1880s, French socialism was certainly building up its number of voters—with close to 60,000 electors—but it remained marginal. Its emergence was, nonetheless, an important event, and indeed one that transcended the national context. This was the first de facto Marxist-inspired programme developed by any political organisation, as weak as that organisation was for now. Of course, the German organisation was the strongest, and had adopted a programme already in 1875. But this so-called Gotha Programme (named after the city where the congress had taken place) had conceded a great deal to the partisans of Ferdinand Lassalle—hence the cutting rebuttal Marx offered in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, a text that remained unpublished in his lifetime in order to avoid a break with his party comrades. The differences were clear: indeed, the Parti Ouvrier programme was more starkly Marxist. It would still take a few years for this programme to be definitively established. But the main guidelines of the 1880 programme adopted at the Le Havre congress would remain.[2] Historian Wolfgang Abendroth notes with good reason that this document largely foreshadowed the famous Marxist programmes of the Austrian and German social-democratic parties, passed a decade later at the Hainfeld Congress (Austria, 1889) and most importantly the Erfurt Congress (Germany, 1891).[3]

Yet beyond such ideological proclamations, the party remained weakly centralised, and included multiple different sensibilities. Formally speaking, Guesde and his 'collectivist' theses had imposed their will. But in reality, a battle was raging within French socialism—indeed, in this era it was what the American historian Samuel Bernstein aptly calls a real 'Babel of doctrines'.[4] Conflicts with all those who rejected the programme's Marxist and revolutionary coloration soon intensified. At the Reims Congress in October–November 1881, Benoît Malon, together with other figures like Paul Brousse and, indeed, Jules Joffrin, tabled a motion

[2] It was published with a commentary in 1883—see p. 35.

[3] Wolfgang Abendroth, *Histoire du mouvement ouvrier en Europe*, Paris, Maspero, 1973, p. 47.

[4] Samuel Bernstein, 'Jules Guesde, Pioneer of Marxism', *Science & Society*, vol. 4, 1/1940, p. 42.

which sought to restrain the centralisation of activity as defended by Guesde. They instead advocated a flexible application of the party doctrine. These 'Malonists' or 'Broussists', who were soon also labelled 'possibilists', were the driving force behind a sensibility of French socialism that instead lay greater emphasis on specific, concrete and gradual reforms. This placed them far from the revolutionary incantations of the first socialist congresses.

Most historical accounts portray the reformist tradition as starting here—that is, as emerging in opposition to the line of revolutionary rupture embodied by Guesde. Yet the realities of the time were not so clear-cut and the passages from one sensibility to the other remained complex. We should be careful not to characterise the differences between these currents in such sharp terms as the split between socialists and communists that followed 1917. Malon would long continue to evoke 'revolutionary forces', even if he did so in service of reform. But already at this point, different—and soon contradictory—orientations were polarising debates. The path lay open to the first fragmentation of French socialism—one that would leave deep and lasting traces.

Jules Guesde played a prominent role, in this regard. The battle was unleashed in September 1882, as the Sixth Congress of the Parti Ouvrier began in Saint-Étienne.[5] Here, Malon fiercely defended 'the peaceful conquest of political power' and the 'prompt realisation of social reforms', even without renouncing the final goal of socialism—a horizon which all still shared. The congress saw increased clashes between partisans of the two camps. Malon's secretary Julien and Lafargue even came to blows. When it was Guesde's turn to speak, he insisted on the need for a revolutionary overthrow—to be achieved by all available means—and upheld the idea of a structured and centralised party, as against any notion of 'federation'. Refusing to make concessions to the majority now taking form, Guesde and five of his close allies were the subject of an exclusion motion.[6] After his partisans accused figures close to Malon of fraud and trickery in counting the votes at the congress, Guesde was himself charged with

[5] Brigitte Carrier-Reynaud, 'Benoit Malon et le congrès socialiste de Saint-Étienne en 1882', in Claude Latta, Marc Vuilleumier and Gérard Gâcon (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 93–108.

[6] Report from the prefect for the Loire to the Interior Ministry, 26 September 1882, cited in ibid., p. 100.

wanting to become the 'supreme director of the party'. A report addressed to the Loire police prefect referred to these divisions and presented a Jules Guesde 'whose authoritarian tendencies are the subject of strong criticism'.[7] Guesde and a few others acknowledged their exclusion and abandoned the congress. After staying one further day at the congress in order to obstruct its work, his partisans soon followed their general.

These departees then convened another congress in Roanne, seventy-five kilometres away. The great dream of a united, strong and powerful socialist party was dissipating: indeed, it would take until 1905 for the various factions of French socialism to seal their unity, recovering from these episodes of division—which were, in fact, only just beginning. The result was that socialism remained a nebula of groups, which subdivided an influence that itself remained very modest. Moreover, it is hardly certain that Guesde regretted this division: in his writings in *l'Égalité*, his tendency was instead to consider such divides necessary, something which ought not be forsaken if it allowed for clarification. In a 15 October 1882 article entitled 'Foire aux candidats', he argued:

> It would be unlike us to beg or complain. The split that has come about between the parliamentary and the revolutionary elements of our proletariat, through the work of organisation, can only be written up as a positive for the social transformation that we pursue and which will impose itself all the more quickly and the more surely now that we will have left by the wayside all those who saw nothing in the general emancipation other than their own particular success.

Sectarian? Without doubt, Guesde did not mince his words in stigmatising his adversaries. But his sharpness also eased the homogenisation of his current, helping to consolidate the embryo of a modern, structured and hierarchically organised political party—the first of its kind. He also knew how to play on his talents, win over others and thus consolidate enduring friendships. Moreover, his will to establish a 'chemically pure' organisation went hand in hand with his extraordinary self-sacrifice and commitment. The saga of Guesde's life is that of a man entirely devoted to his cause: a November 1882 police report emphasised 'the sad situation in which the Guesde family finds itself. His landlord has given him notice,

[7] Ibid.

and his wife and children are without bread.'[8] A subscription was even launched among the Parti Ouvrier's members in order to provide relief to Guesde's family. This extreme deprivation was the background to his bitter political battles. Marcel Cachin, who drew close to the Parti Ouvrier in Bordeaux (gradually becoming one of the most important figures in the Guesdist current) recalled his first encounters with Guesde in the early 1890s:

> Sometimes at the Guesdes' place there was nothing—nothing—to eat. Often it was friends who provided them food, or some precarious and temporary place to stay. Guesde lived all this in the greatest simplicity—his militant commitment was his whole life.[9]

After the Roanne episode, Malon gradually withdrew from activity and turned rather more towards theory. He initiated a high-level review, *La Revue socialiste*, and provided a long-enduring theoretical contribution of which *Le socialisme intégral* (1891) constituted the most important work. Guesde, for his part, in a sense chose the opposite path: he would henceforth offer little in the way of theory but pursued the day-to-day combat more intensely than ever before. A stubborn adversary of 'possibilism', he fought so that 'collectivist' ideas might win majority influence among the socialists. One of his obsessions would be the flushing out of any non-collectivist and unscientific idiosyncrasies among his socialist rivals. A man of what Paul Bénichou called the 'time of prophets',[10] Guesde heralded the coming death-agony of capitalism, which would by necessity result in a better, egalitarian world. Imbued by the scientism of the time, he considered the advent of socialism an inevitability. His criticism of all those who did not accept this framework earned him a reputation, both within and outside the socialist movement, as a 'pince-nez Torquemada'.

The Orator

Party congresses—and in particular the congress at Roanne—confirmed a characteristic trait of Guesde as a figure. He was not really a man of the written word. Orality played an essential role in the birth of the organised

[8] APP BA/1482, rapport Ludovic, November 1882.

[9] Marcelle Hertzog-Cachin, *Regards sur la vie de Marcel Cachin*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 1980, p. 24.

[10] Paul Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1977.

workers' movement: bearing this in mind allows us to understand the echo that Guesde enjoyed. Indeed, over many speeches he repeated the same few formulas drawn from Marx, often illustrating them and adding colour by invoking concrete examples. He addressed himself to an audience that was convinced, or sometimes hostile—but rarely indifferent. An indefatigable orator and polemicist, he tirelessly travelled to and fro throughout France, to support his allies and increasingly—and this is a theme to which we shall return—during election campaigns. Between 1882 and 1890 he chalked up over a thousand meetings at which he expounded his doctrine. Half-a-century later, Bracke—a professor among his most loyal comrades-in-arms—evoked Guesde's heroic years:

> His whole existence was now within the Parti Ouvrier Français. It was doubtless in this period that his eloquence was at its maximum. It was admirable: a concise, full speech in which the chain of arguments followed one after the other in a tight dialectic, rather than being represented or suggested in order to ease their elaboration. There was a constant clearness in the terms used, a voice which carried—even if it was not among the loudest, its strident accent reached into the listener's very core, a contagious, ardent drive. All this did not only prompt applause. It compelled, if not always conviction, then at least reflection.[11]

In the majority of cases, his texts published as pamphlets were transcriptions of his congress speeches, his public talks, or, later, his interventions in the National Assembly. The only real written medium with which he seemed at ease was political journalism. But even here his concision and polemical style strongly resembled speech. The same could be said of his private correspondence. This was incomparable to other theorists of Marxism: in his letters he expressed himself in a concise and often summary fashion. Did Guesde have difficulties writing? Did he see no interest in it? Had Marx and the rest not already formulated the essential things? It needs to be understood that Guesde like many of his partisans thought of themselves as day-to-day politicians, almost in the professional sense of the term.[12] Moreover, the effort to publish extracts of theoretical texts in *Le Socialiste* may have discouraged Guesde and the editorial team: doing this did not allow the paper really to establish itself and nor did it help in

[11] 'Jules Guesde vu par Bracke', in *Jules Guesde, Pages choisies*, Cahier no. 6, supplement to *L'OURS* no. 7, January 1970, p. 9.

[12] On the 'professionalisation' of politics, see the work of Michel Offerlé.

terms of making it a mass press organ. This experience probably reinforced them in the conviction that it was pointless to take doctrinal texts too seriously, for they were too inaccessible for militants and sympathisers.

Guesde was himself the guarantee of an undeviating line that bore an intangible truth. One of his contributions to the history of socialism was that he helped invent loyalty to the party, in the face of all comers. For some—including a number of intellectuals—this made Guesde someone with whom to avoid association. For others, however, this constituted one of the factors that made him most attractive: for the working class and its party were two elements of the future. Thus, even if Guesde's texts may seem rather wearing for today's reader, they ought to be situated in their proper historical context. Rarely providing for sociological distinctions among the workers—even though such distinctions were self-evident, already at the time—Guesde instead provided an all-encompassing interpretation that united them. Similarly, Guesde did all but nothing to theorise the need for unity among the different socialist currents or pluralism within a single organisation[13]; if, in practice, he did become a convert to unity, for a long time he had first and foremost defended his own current's existence.

Faced with the 'Bourgeois State'

The forces of order considered the 'collectivists' close to Guesde suspicious and dangerous, and they were now closely monitored by the authorities. His arguments against private property appeared so incendiary at this time that—at least as far as the partisans of order were concerned—he was barely to be distinguished from the anarchists. The police like the conservative and even republican press considered his attacks as 'blunders'. Thus, when Guesde passed through Perpignan on 8 December 1883 the republican paper *L'indépendant des Pyrénées-orientales* damned an 'anarchist meeting': Guesde supposedly 'outraged the whole room by sullying the Great Revolution of '89, which he cast as thievery—the Revolution, thievery!'

This activism again earned him legal troubles. After a series of talks in the Allier *département*, he and his comrade Jean Dormoy were hauled before its Assizes Court in April 1883 and sentenced to six months' imprisonment for incitement to civil war. His friend Henri Carette—the

[13] Marc Angenot, *Le marxisme dans les grands récits. Essai d'analyse du discours*, Paris-Laval, L'Harmattan-Presses de l'Université Laval (Québec), 2005.

future socialist mayor of Roubaix—then suffered the same fate on similar grounds.

In this context, Guesde's hostility towards the state and the Republic deepened: how could one imagine reforming a regime that so doggedly persecuted socialists? Guesde profited from this fresh spell in the Pélagie prison to get to grips with this very problem. He drafted a pamphlet entirely directed against his 'possibilist' adversaries who advocated a gradual reform of the state. This became *Services publics et socialisme*, which was published in 1883. This short text showed all of Guesde's theoretical limits but also his capacities as a propagandist. In thirty-odd pages he debunked the idea that the current state could allow for the development of public services:

> Founded on class antagonism, on the economic and political subordination of a majority of non-property-owners to a property-owning minority, present-day society allows no place for any truly public service, which is to say one which benefits everyone equally.[14]

The seizure of political power and the revolution constituted prior conditions for the building of public services, which—if they remained within the bourgeois orbit—would otherwise be barely able to benefit workers under the current system. Guesde's whole line of argument was thus dedicated to an energetic refutation of the possibilists, for whom public services instead constituted a beginning of *the possible*, liable to lead gradually to a wider socialisation. Reviewing the historical situations from the monarchy onward when the state had nationalised some sector of the economy, Guesde concluded that it was impossible within the capitalist context to develop any public service that would be able to represent the onset of emancipation:

> Behind these measures were the different (military, fiscal, policing etc.) needs of the various governments. … Hence the variability of the governmental form and governing personnel over time and space, and the local, temporary or accidental character of these services.[15]

[14] Robert Stuart, *Marxism at Work. Ideology, Class and French Socialism during the Third Republic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 249–250.

[15] Jules Guesde, *Services publics et socialisme*, Paris, Henri Oriol, 1884, p. 7.

Rediscovering the libertarian tones of his youth—or inspired, more or less directly, by Marx's more anti-statist texts—Guesde denounced the growth of the professionalised civil service as a process symmetrical to and indissociable from capitalist exploitation. Recognising the 'bureaucratisation' of modern society, he damned 'the *fonctionnariat* which some dare to present as an at least temporary ideal [but which] is no less than wage-labour based on the division of society into classes, on the basis of the subordination of the non-possessor class to the possessor class'.[16] Lastly, recognising the strike as an 'officer school' of workers' organisation, he nonetheless set limits on its political significance. Guesde would remain intransigent on this point and would always oppose with all his strength those for whom the strike constituted the main means for overturning social relations.

Advocating the conquest of the state, Guesde simultaneously remained imbued with a strong anti-statism. He was guided by his hatred of republicans' hypocrisy. Bearing witness to this is another short text, in a pamphleteering tone, co-signed together with Paul Lafargue. Dealing with the French Revolution and its heritage, it would, however, be published only some twenty years later. This *Critical Essay on the French Revolution of the Eighteenth Century*[17] was intended as the prelude to a longer work, which would never see the light of day; its avowed ambition was, however, very clear, for the book was to be placed 'under the patronage of the true defeated of this period, the working people'. The French Revolution—above all, a bourgeois revolution—heralded the Republic that swindled the people and threw its representatives in jail.

Taking to the offensive, that same year Guesde wrote an explanation of the party programme, again together with Lafargue, entitled *The Programme of the Parti Ouvrier, Its History*.[18] Through this textual explanation, the two lynchpins of Guesdism engraved in marble their own interpretation of the first socialist programme. Also written from the Sainte-Pélagie prison, this short essay—a hundred-odd pages long and aimed at workers—was intended as 'an arsenal for their everyday struggle against the present order'. The authors first of all insisted on the

[16] Ibid., p. 18.

[17] Jules Guesde, Paul Lafargue, 'Essai critique sur la révolution française du xviii[e] siècle', *Études socialistes*, March–April 1903, pp. 65–69.

[18] Jules Guesde, Paul Lafargue, *Le programme du parti ouvrier, son histoire, ses considérants, ses articles,* Paris, Henri Oriol, 1883.

programme's internationalist outlook: 'It embodies all the demands of the proletariat not only of France, but of the entire world'. Then they described the future collective form of property: prepared already by capitalist concentration, this collective form was, indeed, inevitable. The main horizon remained the expropriation of the capitalist class, to be accomplished through revolution. The text was shot-through with great optimism: humanity's future would be better thanks to progress that was already underway. It would suffice to place it in service of all, by way of socialism.

Insisting that elections were purely instrumental in character, and that mass propaganda was above all educational in nature, the pair proposed as an immediate measure—joining the party! Standing halfway between the vanguard party and the mass party, Guesde and Lafargue set down the main guidelines of their tendency, which granted an essential role to the educational dimension. Indeed, propaganda, translated into multiple forms (in the press, in spoken lectures, etc.) was to constitute the heart of the party's activity.

The Journalist

Since his time in Montpellier, Guesde had relentlessly pursued his activity as a political journalist. Barely after he left prison, he joined the paper *Le Cri du peuple*, founded by Jules Vallès. For want of any stable press outlet—for *l'Égalité/Le Socialiste* regularly died and started out anew—it was in Vallès's paper that Guesde most clearly expressed his views in the 1880s, alongside his many pieces published in *Le Citoyen*. In the *Cri* we find a considerable number of articles, which were often violently polemical, sometimes to the point of excess. And on other occasions, they very much hit the target. Guesde pursued his career as a polemicist, something he embraced openly.

Between 1883 and 1887, Guesde and his allies did much to take over the columns of *Le Cri du peuple*. In its pages Guesde expounded many of his political ideas, some of which would remain unchanged up till his death. In 1887 he finally left the paper out of opposition to its anarchist ideas: it would soon pass into the hands of the neo-Blanquists, before disappearing in 1889. But given the *Cri*'s large circulation and readership—for instance, Émile Zola regularly consulted it and had a close friend

working there[19]—it allowed Guesde to make his positions widely known. Guesde's contributions 'drew a lot of supporters to the party', according to Bracke[20]; some of them were collected in the book *Le socialisme au jour le jour* at the turn of the century.

In its pages, we first of all find the same themes discussed in his pamphlet on public services, which were here presented in near-identical terms. Anti-statism remained a constant: Guesde inveighed against 'statisation', 'universal bureaucracy' and the 'louis-blancisme' which would transform private industries into state ones. He rejected public services and nationalisation: to take these latter measures would change nothing except who the masters happened to be. Again, a certain libertarian inspiration shone through in some pieces: Guesde defended free love in 'Les divorçards' (9 June 1884) and even spoke up for the right to *revolvériser* in certain cases: in his 10 January 1886 article 'Vive le revolver!' he defended a woman who had killed her husband, guilty of abandoning their child.

Engels's *Socialism. Utopian and Scientific* had just been published in French, in 1880. In this text, Engels sharply counterposed a new form of party, armed with a 'scientific' theory, to the pathetic 'utopians' of the 1830s–1860s. Guesde further developed this strict separation in his writing. Republican politicians also earned his ire, notably Jules Ferry, nicknamed 'Ferry-Famine' (as the title of one 1 February 1884 piece had it); 'Le triomphe de M. Ferry' (4 February 1884) violently attacked the head of government. Guesde above all criticised Ferry's domestic policies; he also denounced his colonial expeditions, albeit most of all on account of their repercussions for French workers. The internationalism so proudly professed in the commentary on the Parti Ouvrier programme rapidly came up against its limits in Guesde's texts on current affairs. In a piece entitled 'Meurent les ouvriers français!' (10 February 1886) Guesde slammed falling wages. But the blame, here, lay with the invasion of foreigners. Guesde showed no hesitation in attacking the danger the Chinese supposedly represented; he re-offended a few months later, on 3 May 1886, when he hammered this point home in a piece responding to a strike by workers in Decazeville:

[19] Joseph Genuzio, *Jules Guesde et Émile Zola, ou Le socialisme dans l'œuvre d'Émile Zola*, Bari, Levante, 1964, p. 144.

[20] Bracke, art. cit., p. 10.

> The struggle that our compatriots from Decazeville are mounting against the foreign exploiters does not notably differ from the heroic fight our ancestors waged when they hunted Roman eagles or dispersed the English bands.

Citing this article in hindsight, Jaurès passed sharp judgement on what he termed a 'monolithic, mercantile, retrograde, Celtic and Montagnard nationalism, the stuff of shopkeepers'.[21]

In these pieces, Guesde also advanced a simplistic application of the theory of surplus-value that had appeared in Marx's *Capital*, as he damned the exploitation of the toiling masses. His denunciation of the theft of labour went hand in hand with a specific valorisation of the work carried on by the working class. This stance was rooted in workerism, a particular form of working-class identity whose sources lie outside of Marxism. Guesde thus mixed different inheritances, including that of Proudhonism, even though he had officially turned his back on this latter.

As for cooperativism, Guesde saw this as a mere con-trick, unless it was under socialist control. In this view, to form non-socialist cooperatives would only lead to delays in the onward march of the proletarian revolution. Underlining the success of the cooperative bakery in Ghent, Belgium, Guesde saluted this experience, but further specified:

> But how and why was this result arrived at? It was because under the influence of Marxists like Anselle and Van Beveren the company's commercial ends made way for propaganda purposes. Lower-cost bread was but a means to bring men together and convey ideas, with all the profits made serving to found and sustain a combative newspaper.[22]

As for the rivalries among the Great Powers, Guesde did not hesitate to write of the 'destinies [that would] soon be fulfilled'—even exclaiming 'Long live war'. The war would, 'in any which way it finishes, carry out revolutionary work'.[23] In this perspective, the result of the conflicts among the Great Powers would be revolution: Guesde here remembered the recent experience of 1870, which had seen the birth of the Third Republic and then the Commune. All this led him to believe that history would repeat itself.

[21] Jean Jaurès, op. cit., p. 93.
[22] 'La coopération', *Le Cri du Peuple*, 9 September 1886.
[23] 'Vive la guerre', *Le Cri du Peuple*, 3 May 1885.

Finally, Guesde also outlined another leitmotiv—one which died hard but long also served as a means of delineation from other socialist sensibilities. This lay in his refusal to choose the Republic over any other regime, so long as it remained dominated by the bourgeoisie:

> Be it empire or republic, a state of things which is limited to assuring [the worker] work in present conditions—which is to say, enriching non-workers at the expense of workers, reduced to what is strictly indispensable for their subsistence and reproduction—is not and never will be [the worker's own].[24]

Guesde repeated these arguments across many interviews, for example one which he granted to Émile Zola. Fascinated by the articles in *Le Cri du peuple*, Zola had asked his friend Paul Alexis, one of the driving forces behind this same publication, to organise a series of meetings with Guesde. They took place in May 1886, as Zola was writing *La Terre*. Zola has bequeathed us a few enthusiastic—but also critical—notes from these encounters. Citing his interview with Guesde, he noted him as saying:

> All the ideas of '89—old hat—the Revolution of '89 came inevitably; '93 was but music. Which little had tarnished, moreover. He treats the Great Revolution as a matter of legend. … All this is small, petty, faced with what remains to be done, the true revolution. Power must pass into the hands of another class, the workers, so that capitalist drudgery, the bourgeois government, might disappear.[25]

When reading or listening to Guesde, many of his contemporaries emphasised the gap which separated his programme of sometimes very specific reforms from his revolutionary rhetoric, disconnected from the concrete measures thus advanced. But did the alchemy between the two really work? A repetitive rhetoric maintained a certain revolutionary eschatology, however institutionalised it may have become. Of course, we could easily point to its theoretical weaknesses; but as we might say today, its 'political hardware' did work. Historian Robert Stuart well understood this, aptly noting that 'the Guesdists' theoretical incoherence served them rather well, arming them against their different types of enemies'.[26]

[24] 'Le droit au travail', *Le Cri du Peuple*, 22 May 1884.
[25] BNF Archives Émile Zola, 'Notes sur Guesde', cited by Genuzio, op. cit., p. 148.
[26] Robert Stuart, op. cit., p. 84.

Guesde, a Marxist?

This panorama of Guesde's writings, articles and pamphlets invites us to look back to a major historical fact with which his name is irreversibly associated: the introduction of Marxism in France. Though the Guesdists presented themselves as the faithful heirs to Marx and Engels, they were the subject of sharp critiques by the men most directly concerned: indeed, Marx would repeatedly emphasise their narrowness. On 3 August 1882, after a whirlwind visit to France where he also met Guesde, Marx made some far from friendly comments on Guesde and Lafargue to Engels.[27]

As Marx supposedly told Engels, distancing himself from the French socialists inspired by their ideas, 'What I know is that I am no Marxist!'[28] This is a famous line and, indeed, a very explicit one. Yet it does nothing to explain why Guesde's 'Marxism', with all its limits, met with such enduring success. After all, Marx's death in 1883 was, indeed, followed by the birth of 'Marxism'—a pejorative term first used by the anarchists and then adopted by Marx's partisans in the 1880s. First coming into use in Germany, the term then spread across all Europe. 'Collectivist' was, by and large, a French equivalent, corresponding to 'Guesdist'. This latter term, would, indeed, enter history—polemical in its origins, it remains a convenient way of designating a certain current.

In reality, the simplistic doctrine which Guesde elaborated in his propaganda pamphlets obviously had little in common with the sheer density of Marx's argumentation. Many of this latter's texts remained unavailable in French. Guesde's 'translation' of Marx was not a simple matter of rendering the German into French: rather, what most needed doing was to translate complex theories into the language of the people. In this regard, Guesde undoubtedly did leave a mark on French Marxism—though it is not reducible to him alone, he was certainly one of its most important figures. To the end, he himself laid claim to the heritage of Marxism, an inheritance so specific that—astonishingly enough—Guesde never sought to develop or renew it, but simply to repeat it to his dying breath.

Of course, the demands of popularisation could not justify each and every time that Guesde only approximately rendered Marx's ideas. For example, one could hardly deny Guesde's enthusiasm for the—far from Marxian—idea of the 'iron law of wages'. One of his closest allies,

[27] Marx to Engels, 3 August 1882, in MECW, Vol. 46, pp. 295–98.
[28] Engels to Conrad Schmidt, 5 August 1890, in MECW, Vol. 49, pp. 6–9.

Compère-Morel, was at this time the driving force behind a small socialist group, before he joined the Parti Ouvrier in 1893. Even as he heaped praise on his teacher, he recognised that Guesde had become 'a Marxist without reading or understanding Marx'![29] Fundamentally, Guesde had never made any pretence of really knowing the master's works in any depth; he was a man of the spoken word, who used simple lines of argument to convince audiences lacking in theoretical formation. 'Those who listened to him', Compère-Morel insisted elsewhere, 'however limited their culture and however mediocre their knowledge, could easily follow his reasoning and perfectly grasp its sense without any strain'.[30] Engels, often annoyed by Guesde's excessive over-simplification, also recognised his effectiveness at this level. Having read many of Guesde's texts, he could note his talents as a populariser. In 1881 he wrote to Bernstein that 'Guesde's pamphlets and articles are the best of their kind published in French, and he is one of the best speakers on the squares of Paris. And we have always found him open and reliable.'[31] Engels said this even as he emphasised that he did not truly know Guesde, and even as he repeatedly criticised him. In short, Guesde was de facto one of the leading Marxists, and looking through the rest of Engels's correspondence, we see that it was very rare indeed for a Frenchman to fully gain his blessing.

Tellingly, we would have to look beyond the circle of Guesdists, for example seeking out the very liberal *Journal des économistes*, to find any real discussion and reception of Karl Marx's *Capital*.[32] Later, major figures discussed Marxism's presuppositions and/or introduced texts, sparking multiple exchanges on the nature of Marxism. The Germanist Charles Andler, Georges Sorel, Hubert Lagardelle, and indeed, in a certain measure, Jaurès, as well as certain others, made up part of this cohort. The review entitled *Le Mouvement socialiste* embodied this theoretical moment. Guesde did not make up part of this same dynamic. But rather than try and distinguish a 'good' Marxism as counterposed to an illegitimate, vulgarised form, it instead seems necessary to acknowledge that its existence was multiform. There were at least two opposed Marxisms: an intellectual

[29] Adéodat Compère-Morel, *Jules Guesde, le socialisme fait homme 1845–1922*, Paris, Aristide Quillet, 1937, p. 84.

[30] Ibid., p. 260.

[31] Friedrich Engels to Eduard Bernstein in Zurich, 25 October 1881, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow: Progress, 1975.

[32] Jacqueline Cahen, 'La réception de l'œuvre de Karl Marx par les économistes français (1871–1883)', *Mil-neuf-cent*, no. 1, 1994, pp. 19–50.

and rather more academic, often critical, Marxism, well-versed in the theoretical discussions expounded in certain reviews, and a vulgarised, propagandistic, purely political Marxism—of which the Guesdists constituted the most significant incarnation, along with Vaillant's neo-Blanquists. This was a lasting division, which can be observed over the long term.[33] For Guesde and many of those close to him, the revolution was not something to wait for: rather, it was necessary immediately to grasp hold of the revolutionary content in Marx's text and repeat it up till the triumph of socialism. Lack of doubt was a marker of Guesde's personality as of his political line. This intransigence would earn him lasting animosities and many—often justified—sarcastic barbs.

Nonetheless, we should be careful, here, for Guesde's narrow vulgate itself masks another reality which is often too-little emphasised: for the political and friendship circles with which he surrounded himself certainly were interested in Marx and the reception of his texts. Indeed, many of his close allies showed real interest for Marx's works—and reading several accounts, we understand that Guesde, too, took from Marx and Marxism what some of his friends who better knew and read the texts had told him about them. This, even if several of them later distanced themselves from Guesde. The examples of Malon and Deville are symptomatic of how great proximity could transform into opposition. At the outset, Malon's *La Revue socialiste* published texts close to Guesde's own conceptions: for instance, this was the organ which first published Engels's *Socialism. Utopian and Scientific* in 1880. After his break with Malon, in 1883, Gabriel Deville—loyal to Guesde up to the end of the 1880s—published a simplified version of Volume I of *Capital*, soon after Marx's death. It had been this latter's ardent wish that following the French-language publication of his book, an abridged and more accessible version could be read by socialist activists and sympathisers. This was, indeed, one of the last wishes he expressed with regard to the French political situation. *Capital* would thus be understood and read by many militants by way of Deville's greatly simplified version.

Deville worked a great deal with Lafargue on this popularisation effort, by way of lectures; some of them were even translated and published in several languages. For example, in 1882 Lafargue and his wife Laura first

[33] Vincent Chambarlhac, 'L'orthodoxie marxiste de la SFIO: à propos d'une fausse évidence (1905–1914)', *Cahiers d'histoire-Revue d'histoire critique*, January–March 2011, pp. 39–51.

published a French translation of the *Communist Manifesto* in the pages of *l'Égalité*. And it was Guesde's close friend Édouard Fortin (one of the three executors of his will in 1922, together with Charles Bonnier and Bracke),[34] a municipal councillor in Beauvais (1888–1891) and a member of the Parti Ouvrier from the outset, who translated Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* for the Éditions du Parti Ouvrier. Fortin, an active militant, was also a regular translator of shorter texts, such as Engels's new prefaces for new editions of his texts. After getting the green light from Engels to translate his new preface for the US edition of *The Condition of the English Working Class*, Fortin wrote a letter to Guesde, fearing that he would not win his approval[35]; ultimately the text appeared with Guesde's authorisation, though some marginal revisions had visibly been made. Doubtless, there were no great theoretical matters at stake, here. But Guesde was consulted as an authority on this subject.

Thus, some Marx texts were regularly translated and published in *Le Socialiste* and on the periphery of the Guesdist circles, even if the efforts they made remained relatively modest. What should we conclude from this? If Guesde and those around him were not the only, often not the first and certainly not the most brilliant forces introducing Marxism to France, to say that they completely neglected Marx's work seems an unfair judgement. Indeed, it does not take account of their own imperatives, which above all concerned day-to-day, immediate politics. It was this that must have most driven Marx and Engels's despair—doubtless they were themselves firmly committed to political struggle, but so, too, to a parallel, constant and in-depth research into the history and contemporary evolution of capitalism. The two founders of 'scientific socialism' nonetheless overlooked a fundamental historical process that was taking its first steps around the end of their lives; one was destined to take on great proportions: the professionalisation of politics, of which Guesde was one of the first incarnations.

The Guesdists' Rootedness

Beyond their more or less Marxist statements of intent, what progress was Guesde's current making across the territory of the Republic? At the 1885 parliamentary elections the collectivists did, undeniably, make progress,

[34] On Bonnier and Bracke, see p. 53.
[35] IISG J. G. Letter from Édouard Fortin to Jules Guesde, 21 June 1887.

but the only candidates who managed to secure election were those who benefited from the 'republican concentration'. They thus made up part of a deployment of forces that extended beyond the strict class independence advocated by Guesde, bringing together an advanced segment of the broader republican contingent. Notably elected was a certain Basly, setting himself up as the voice of the Decazeville miners. On 13 February 1886, Guesde poetically greeted this development in *Le Cri du peuple*:

> The classes and their fatal struggle yesterday entered the Palais-Bourbon, separated by their dead, which they will throw in each others' face, creating two Parliaments in the Parliament just as there are two nations in the nation.

Shortly afterward, Guesde held a rally together with Louise Michel in order to support the Decazeville strikers in their ongoing struggle: two militants, Ernest Roche and Duc-Quercy (this latter was correspondent for *Le Cri du peuple*) were charged and convicted for 'provocation to murder and pillage' in April 1886, for which crime they were sentenced to fifteen months' imprisonment. However, they were soon acquitted. The battle between the classes was raging.

At the electoral level, municipal contests consolidated the first foundations that had been built. Following the symbolically important election of the world's first socialist majority (in Commentry, in the Allier *département*, in 1882) the Parti Ouvrier's representatives entered a number of town halls in 1888. While Guesde was, formally speaking, very critical of universal suffrage, electoral contests occupied a growing part of his day-to-day existence. Indeed, we see as much from his correspondence with his local lieutenants. A first map of the Guesdist implantation was taking shape already, as defined by the different regions where Guesde regularly came to give talks. Allier—which, alongside Commentry, heralded the new era of socialist municipalities—became an enduring fortress of Guesdism, built around the figure of Jean Dormoy, elected mayor of Montluçon in 1892. For his part, Pédron became a trusty connection in the Aube *département*, another area where the socialists generally adopted a Guesdist line. In 1887, Guesde's tour of the Gironde—where solid bases would be established notably around Raymond Lavigne and Marcel Cachin—aided the consolidation of a first core. Of course, Le Nord was also important: the future mayor of Lille, Gustave Delory, was already addressing numerous letters to Guesde, containing reports on the gradual

implantation and structuring of the party in this region.[36] Le Nord was for a time home to his friend Charles Bonnier (whom we will address later), who also provided him the latest news. Guesde closely followed these developments in what would soon become his happiest hunting ground.

The explanation for this rootedness is not limited to these regions' social conditions (the revolutionary legacy of the French Revolution and the nineteenth century often also bore a major influence) but nor can these latter be ignored. At least in the first phase of their history, the Guesdist electorate and militant base often shared the common traits of coming from a poor, uprooted, and low-skilled working-class milieu. The textile *bagnes* [literally, 'hard labour camps'] were emblematic of this, in the image of the weavers of Roubaix and Roanne. 'The millenarianism of the Guesdist preachers, of strong prophetic tones, had a powerful force of attraction in these working-class milieux, ready for revolt as for resignation and lacking in any horizon,' Rémi Lefebvre aptly argues, on the basis of his in-depth research into the town of Roubaix.[37]

The founder of the Parti Ouvrier aroused often lively admiration among its partisans—some would even later call this an embryo of the 'cult of personality'. In 1888, Jean Dormoy proudly wrote to him 'Some have even called me the Guesde of the Allier [*département*], and it greatly honoured me to be called a Guesde'.[38] Mireille Osmin, daughter of a loyal Guesdist in the Paris region, recalled her father's dithyrambic arguments:

> All those who approached him had very great admiration for him. … His influence sprung born from the radiance of his personality, from the radiance of his intelligence, perhaps also from his physique, and from the seriousness with which he threw himself into the fray.[39]

But the apparent cohesion behind the chief hid major differences. The Guesdists were often perceived—and stigmatised—by their contemporary adversaries as a compact bloc, a unified 'sect'; but in reality, the contradictions within their ranks constantly undermined or even weakened them.

[36] IISG J. G. Letter from Gustave Delory ato Jules Guesde, 26 April 1889.

[37] Rémi Lefebvre, *Le socialisme saisi par l'institution municipale: des années 1880 aux années 1980: jeux d'échelles*, Political science PhD dissertation, Université de Lille II, 2001, p. 87.

[38] IISG J. G. Letter from Jean Dormoy ato Jules Guesde, 1 November 1888.

[39] Mireille Osmin, 'L'héritage de Guesde dans le mouvement ouvrier français. Autour du livre de Claude Willard', *Démocratie nouvelle*, March 1966, p. 21.

'Elections' go hand in hand with 'alliances'. In the case of Guesde and his partisans, these alliances were, to say the least, highly varied. Officially, Guesde put all the factions of the bourgeoisie on an equal footing. But such an approach was sometimes interpreted by others—in more or less good faith—as an opening to alliance with just *anyone*, so long as socialism was progressing. In certain arrangements, the Guesdists privileged closer relations with republicans. In other cases, some socialists attempted adventures, for instance together with the Boulangists. Along with a certain number of socialists, Lafargue was unwilling to neglect the path of alliance with the friends of 'General Revanche' Georges Boulanger, a former Armies Minister who rallied the support of many discontented elements in this era. In a long 8 July 1889 letter addressed to Guesde, his Bordeaux lieutenant Raymond Lavigne justified a local alliance with the Boulangists and even deplored the fact that the same had not taken place elsewhere. 'Socialists must penetrate everywhere and profit from everything',[40] he insisted. The consequence was that several Boulangist MPs were elected in 1891 with the support of socialist partisans of Guesde—who did not disavow them.

Guesde also threw himself into the electoral adventure; indeed, this effort would remain a continuing part of his life until his last days. The Marseilles socialists proposed to Guesde that he should represent them in the city's heavily working-class second constituency in the 1889 parliamentary elections. The result: in many locations, socialists close to Guesde made progress or even achieved election. But in Marseilles, Guesde came second, beaten by the opportunist republican. Protot, an old Communard, came in third place, probably taking a lot of votes off Guesde; refusing to stand aside in the second round, Protot still gathered some 900 votes. Yet Guesde was only 500 off being elected. The Guesdists fell victim to what they themselves were doing elsewhere. During this very violent campaign, his adversary Protot—foregrounding his own past as a patriotic Communard—damned Guesde as the 'paid agent of Germany', proclaiming 'Run away from his banner and his partisans. His banner is the Black Eagle which has three times in seventy-five years torn through the heart of France.'[41] This accusation would die hard: in each subsequent electoral campaign, Guesde's adversaries stigmatised this friend of German social democracy as 'pro-German'.

[40] IISG J. G. Letter from Raymond Lavigne to Jules Guesde, 8 July 1889.
[41] IISG J. G. Electoral documents from the 1889 campaign.

Guesde and the New International

This accusation did have *some* foundation. As we have seen, Guesde's trajectory from the 1870s was closely linked to his German *alter egos*. To understand Guesde is thus to situate him in the geography of the European socialism of the time, within which he occupied an increasingly important place—especially over the 1880s.

Socialists needed to provide themselves the means to rebuild what had collapsed before: an International uniting them all. In a letter addressed to Lafargue, containing instructions explicitly also intended for Guesde, Engels had warned 'To regain your position in France, you need, in the first place, international recognition'.[42] How and when could a new body for international coordination be rebuilt? In this process, it was Paul Lafargue—a close confidant of Engels—who played the predominant role. Guesde had never mastered German, and remained above all a man of domestic politics. This did not mean that the strategic importance of the International escaped him: already in 1884, the Roubaix congress of the Parti Ouvrier posed the problem of reconstituting the International.

All talk of the International also concerned the links with a socialist party that was now undergoing rapid expansion and enjoyed incontestable theoretical legitimacy: the German party. For Guesde's partisans, who claimed to be Marxists, such ties clearly provided a platform for the further development of their current. Guesde himself was well-known among the cadres of the party that officially took the name SPD (German Social-Democratic Party) in 1890. Many of his articles were translated in the *Sozialdemokrat*, edited by Eduard Bernstein from his exile in Zürich. In exchange, *Le Socialiste* regularly published statements by the German social-democrats, among which we can also find brief biographical sketches of Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel. In this same organ, Guesde regularly revisited the heroic activism of the German social-democrats, who were still engaged in a test of strength with Otto von Bismarck. Up till 1890 he renewed the banning laws against the social-democrats, considerably limiting their political activity.

But while these ties grew stronger, this was very largely a one-way transfer: it was a matter of France taking a model from what Guesde himself called the international 'vanguard of socialism', namely the German

[42] Friedrich Engels to Paul Lafargue, 23 March 1889, in MECW, Vol. 48.

party.[43] By no means was this a case of mutually drawing inspiration from each other's experiences: despite its glorious revolutionary past, French socialism seemed far too weak and divided in the Germans' eyes for it to have any real power of attraction over them. In this context, the adversaries of socialism had no monopoly on Germanophobia—far from it. Even at the Roanne congress in 1882, Guesde appeared as 'Marx's man'. Paul Brousse there vigorously denounced the 'ultramontanes of socialism' who, he said, 'could not obey the decisions of the party and its congresses because their real boss is in London'.[44] Did this perhaps express the jealousy, among some people, of not being in contact with the great theorist of *Capital*? Without doubt, there was a fight over political capital, and this battle had turned, for the moment, to Guesde's advantage. These privileged ties allowed him to consolidate his living legend: indeed, Eduard Bernstein, a loyal lieutenant of Engels, emphasised that in this era Guesde was the 'smuggler' of German socialist texts into France *par excellence*. At this time opposed to Malon, Bernstein warned Engels that Guesde might be marginalised by his battle against the 'possibilists'—something which would have had more general negative repercussions on the current embodied by Marx. He wrote to Engels that 'among the French socialists there dominates the conviction that Guesde is no other than Marx's spokesman' and drew the analysis that Malon and Joffrin's attacks were more directed against Marx than against Guesde as such. The conclusion was definitive: 'Hence a defeat for Guesde would also be a defeat for Marx'.[45]

Beyond Marx, who died at the beginning of 1883, Guesde established personal contacts with many other Germans. Some of these latter were exiled in Paris, thus continuing the tradition of his friendship with Hirsch. These figures were of key importance at a time when German social democracy was gaining influence. In the French capital, Guesde frequented Hermann Grimpe and Clara Zetkin; Bernstein and Wilhelm Liebknecht further met him in early 1884. His friendship with Liebknecht—a deep, enduring one, which lasted until death—was already well-established. These contacts allowed the partisans of Guesde's line to

[43] As one article put it in *Le Socialiste*, 26 February 1887.

[44] Paul Brousse's speech to the Saint-Étienne Congress, 25 September 1882, in *Compte-rendu du sixième congrès national ouvrier de Saint-Étienne*, Paris, Bureaux du Prolétaire, 1882, p. 33.

[45] Letter from Eduard Bernstein to Friedrich Engels, 14 October 1881, in Eduard Bernstein, *Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Engels*, Assen, Van Gorcum, 1970, p. 41.

play a key role with a view to the congress that would found a new International, ultimately held in Paris in July 1889. The history of this event is well known: there were two rival meetings to refound the International, one of which rallied the French 'possibilists' and English trade unions, whereas the other brought together the Germans and, above all, the Guesdists. This latter meeting rallied those for whom the new body would have to be animated by Marxism and the horizon of revolution. In this context, there was no doubt as to the importance of the French socialists' position. Proof of this came from Liebknecht, who wrote to Guesde '*Nous avons besoin de vous*' for the organisation of the international congress, insisting on the cardinal role the French would play.[46]

The moderate delegates were greater in number, but the great international leaders were on Guesde's side: Engels, Bebel and, indeed, the Russian Plekhanov. All in all, nineteen countries were represented. The two congresses aspired to unity, and this was achieved two years later, at Brussels in 1891. The reunification of the International played out to the advantage of the German social-democrats, with a clear prevalence—in words, at least—of Marxist rhetoric. For now, even the anarchists signed up to the same organisation, while also energetically challenging the legalist aspects of both sides. Guesde, who had at one time been within the anarchists' own ranks, was now one of their favourite punching bags—and his reaction would never disappoint![47]

With the International now launched, it seemed that the time was ripe for the ineluctable progress of socialism, under the Franco-German banner. Wilhelm Liebknecht wrote to Guesde in emphatic terms, exalting the union between the socialists on the two sides of the Vosges:

> You are right to be happy about our victory. Our struggles and our victories are yours. … You will mark 18 March. We in Germany shall do so, too. 18 March is a date common to both the Germans and the French: 18 March 1848 saw the uprising by the people of Berlin, and 18 March 1871 the uprising by the people of Paris.[48]

The two men's lasting friendship did not mean blind faith—and soon fault-lines emerged. In a personal letter written in late 1892, Liebknecht

[46] IISG J. G. Letter from Wilhelm Liebknecht to Jules Guesde, 8 April 1889.
[47] See Chap. 3.
[48] IISG J. G. Letter from Wilhelm Liebknecht to Jules Guesde, 15 March 1890.

warned his French friend of the dangers of the sectarianism and division that were still eating away at French socialism: 'Are you ready? I see no serious organisation—instead of uniting with other groups, you quarrel among your selves.'[49] There were Blanquists, possibilists, and the pro-Germans, not to mention the anarchist influence: the prospect of a unified party, in a sense a party 'of the German type', still seemed very distant in France.

Beyond his contacts with the Germans, Guesde knew and met with many exiles in this period. Indeed, a whole milieu gravitated around him: to meet him was, in a sense, a compulsory step for revolutionaries residing in Paris. These militants had in common the fact that they were strongly internationalist, in an era in which their political fate in their own homelands remained uncertain. As the historian Georges Haupt has analysed, 'in an era of weak national implantation … the international militant is a central and typical figure'.[50] One of these was the Romanian Christian Rakovsky. Before taking up a decisive role in the Socialist International of the 1910s and then the early Communist International, he met Guesde in Paris in 1892. Guesde left a strong impression upon him:

> I came to the French capital to meet the man for whom the group of Russian and foreign revolutionary Marxists inspired by Plekhanov showed such deep and real admiration. Together with Wilhelm Liebknecht—whom Bismarck's reptilian press termed 'French' because of his internationalism—Jules Guesde was considered one of those who best incarnated the aspirations of internationalist and revolutionary Marxism.[51]

These ties helped spread a positive image of Guesde across the four corners of Europe, as a great revolutionary. Looking at the Romanian case alone, we can find many of his texts translated as articles or in the form of pamphlets.[52]

Despite this, as we have already emphasised it was in fact Lafargue who played the foremost role, as far as international matters were concerned. It is worth dwelling for a moment on the relations between them. While

[49] IISG J. G. Letter from Wilhelm Liebknecht to Jules Guesde, 25 December 1892.

[50] Georges Haupt, 'Groupes dirigeants internationaux du mouvement ouvrier' in *Mélanges d'histoire sociale offerts à Jean Maitron*, Paris, Éditions Ouvrières, 1976, p. 130.

[51] Christian Rakovky, 'Jules Guesde et le communisme', *L'Humanité*, 9 January 1923.

[52] Lucie Guesnier, *La sédimentation des socialismes roumains. Identités socialistes et mouvements sociaux dans le contexte de la modernisation du pays, 1878–1916*, History PhD dissertation at the Université de Paris 1, 2016.

posterity has often associated the two men on account of their ideological affinities, in fact they were a world apart. Compère-Morel, a loyal friend and biographer of Guesde's, underlined that Lafargue 'became, not just his best friend but his loyal brother-in-arms, whose collaboration—as constant as it was effective—would be broken only by death'.[53] Lafargue's American biographer Leslie Derfler saw him as better versed in the battle of ideas than his brother-in-arms Guesde, presenting him as his ideological 'mentor'.[54] But the historical reality clashes with the legend of the union between these two great figures. In fact, they were never close. Their relations always remained extremely cold and even, at certain moments, icy—even to the point that this enmity damaged the coherence of the political current that they embodied. This distance is explained by the two very different types of men they were, and perhaps above all by their two incomparable material situations. While Lafargue was always privileged thanks to his family inheritance, he remained insensitive to Guesde's distress. He moreover deserved his reputation as a dandy cloistered in his fine properties—at a distance from the cut and thrust of politics and the lives of the modest working people, his lifestyle was marked by lavish overspending. Added to this, Lafargue was elected an MP already in 1891 thanks to a by-election, capitalising on the Fourmies drama, unlike Guesde, who had been defeated in the 1889 contest.

In terms of 'political capital', in the international socialism of the era, Lafargue long sat at the very top of the hierarchy: he was the privileged interlocutor of Engels, with whom he maintained an abundant and continuous correspondence. He was far more of an intellectual than was Guesde, though there were some similarities between them in certain 'proletaroid' aspects, such as their common lack of institutional legitimacy. Despite the enmity between the pair Lafargue did inform and advise Guesde, especially with regard to international questions. Engels's death in 1895 would deny Lafargue one of his major advantages. We will return to the ambivalent relationship between this pair. For now, we can conclude that even if the political solidarity between them held firm—even pushing them to hide their disagreements in public—their differences regarding both form and content proved to be a constant issue within the 'collectivist' high command.

[53] Adéodat Compère-Morel, op. cit., p. 164.

[54] Leslie Derfler, *Paul Lafargue and the founding of French Marxism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 2.

Friendships and Enmities

Nonetheless, it is difficult to disentangle friendships from politics: and for Guesde, these things would remain closely interlinked across the greater part of his existence. Among the top ranks of his friends we find the figure of Charles Bonnier. Loyalest of the loyal, Bonnier was in 1922 one of the three executors of Guesde's will. He was a peculiar Guesdist: of university training, he went to Halle, Germany, in 1887–1888, then to London, and most importantly to Oxford in the 1890s as a visiting lecturer [*professeur libre*], before taking up a chair in Liverpool from 1900 to the eve of World War I. Bonnier was a militant 'of the leadership' *par excellence*—he had no local implantation, frequented both French and German leaders and read a great deal. In a 5 September 1892 letter to Karl Kautsky, Engels noted wryly that Bonnier 'live[d] in a world of books'.[55] He knew Engels and Eleanor Marx personally; often invited to, and present at, the SPD's congresses, he regularly contributed to the theoretical review linked to the party, *Die Neue Zeit*. In France, he contributed to the newspapers *Le Socialiste* and *Le Réveil du Nord* (the regional expression of Guesdist socialism) and later to the early French Marxist theoretical journals, like *l'Ère nouvelle*. A polyglot, in contact with multiple European socialists, he also had the great advantage—for the historian, that is—of often being distant from Guesde (including when he was in France) and thus corresponding with him abundantly, thus leaving a large volume of documentation to posterity. A friend of Guesde's already in the 1880s, he served as his compass on a number of points, advising him, informing him, and most importantly entertaining ties with the German social-democrats. 'In the name of Guesde', as he wrote to Engels in December 1889,[56] he also informed high-level figures in the SPD. Bonnier worked assiduously on these contacts, making it possible to fill the columns of the Guesdist press with both original and translated articles by Engels and other prestigious names of international socialism. His activism did no little to feed Guesde's reputation among the German leaders.

[55] Friedrich Engels to Karl Kautsky, 5 September 1892 in Benedikt Kautsky (ed.), *Friedrich Engels' Briefwechsel mit Karl Kautsky*, Vienna, Danubia-Verlag, 1955, p. 364.

[56] Charles Bonnier ato Friedrich Engels, 18 December 1889, in *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe* III/30, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2013, p. 104.

'To be a Guesdist intellectual was not a self-evident move', the historian Christophe Prochasson explains.[57] Without doubt, Guesdist vulgarisation seems to have inspired real—and tenacious—distrust among academics, with a few exceptions. Beyond Bonnier himself, it is worth mentioning other example of the same type, namely Alexandre-Marie Bracke-Desrousseau (and like Guesde himself, he took his mother's surname—Bracke). He was another very close friend of Guesde's and soon became one of the main driving forces behind the Parti Ouvrier. A partner of Guesde's and one of his most loyal heirs, he would maintain a positive memory of Guesde into the mid-1950s.[58] The son of a singer, Bracke was a Hellenist and a translator from German. A bohemian who frequented the cafés of Paris, he was not an inheritor but rather a brilliant student who came from a popular background in Lille, who throughout his life remained attached to the north of France. His career was less tumultuous than Bonnier's. A graduate of the École Normale Supérieure, ranked first in the *agrégation* [teaching exam] for grammar, he became a lecturer at Douai and then at Lille University, where he med Jules Guesde by way of Charles Bonnier. Far from a theorist, he was a teacher, an 'influencer'[59] and a scholar. A philologist and a grammarian with a passion for translations, he combined 'a singular lack of doubt and of faith in philological science'.[60] Bracke accepted the party's discipline and its instructions and had little or no role in the elaboration of doctrine. He wrote numerous polemical articles of a political stamp, but never theoretical treatises. In this sense, he was very close to his mentor Guesde. But there was a clear hierarchy between them: Guesde set the tone, Bracke followed. This was a very particular relationship between intellectual and party, built on admiration but also submission.

Looking beyond these friendships, how far can we get to know the private Guesde? Accounts on this theme are contrasting and are often difficult to detach from political judgements, given how far party struggles interfered in his private relationships. Among the recollections of Guesde that are available to us, some are brilliantly original: one such example was

[57] Christophe Prochasson, 'Entre hellénisme et socialisme: le "cas Bracke"' in Bernard Ménager, Jean-François Sirinelli, Jean Vavasseur-Desperriers (eds.), *Cent ans de socialisme septentrional, Actes du colloque de Lille, 3–4 décembre 1993*, Villeneuve- d'Ascq, Université de Lille III, 1995 pp. 171–193.

[58] On Bracke's memorialisation of Guesde, see Chap. 7.

[59] Christophe Prochasson, art. cit., p. 178.

[60] Ibid., pp. 178–179.

that by Madame Schneidre, heir to the prestigious business family. Indeed, as an irony of history, one of Guesde's descendants became attached to the Schneidre family. Gathering the documentation about her family, she emphasised how far Guesde had struggled to provide for his family's needs in the 1880s. Many letters from his wife Mathilde attest to the extreme deprivation in which he found himself: in one 1883 letter, she wrote to him, explaining that she had been forced to call a doctor for one of the children who was in pain. She added, 'All this cost me 2.50 francs. I'll let you imagine what's left of the 10 francs—I absolutely need to have a decent-sized sum so that I do not remain stuck in this constant distress, which is unbearable.'[61]

Inflexible and brittle in political matters, the private Guesde showed another side: by turns a pianist, a poet, according to many accounts he was well-read, cultured, captivating and erudite. He suffered a great deal—his multiple illnesses forced him always to plan for the risk that he would miss some conference or talk. During these difficult hours he sometimes wrote poetry. After contracting a pulmonary congestion following a talk in Arcachon in winter 1888, he was forced to rest up. He took advantage of this to write several poems—though doubtless there is nothing too memorable about them—suffused with love and pastoral notes. Here he referred to his deplorable health, before his lyrical flourishes got back to the essential thing: the class struggle. A poem on 'free humanity' read

> Yes, I want to see the new order like a sun/Emerging from the sombre horizon/And I want, before the grave/To drain from your eyes caresses without number. … /Then struggle, then fall victorious, on a night/Of great battle in which everything shakes/Having covered the black gulf/ Leaving a free humanity behind me.[62]

Outside of his close family environment, a particularly important figure was Aline Valette, a member of the Parti Ouvrier from its foundation in 1870. She occupied leadership functions in the party up to her death in 1899: the only such woman to do so, she was a teacher to Guesde, who according to many accounts held her in great esteem. He supposedly even said that she was the only woman who had understood Marxism! A

[61] Dominique Schneidre, *Fortune de mère*, Paris, Fayard, 2001, p. 223.

[62] 'Une Humanité libre!', December 1888, cited by Adéodat Compère-Morel, op. cit., pp. 322–323.

convinced feminist—far more so than many of her Parti Ouvrier Français (POF) comrades—she founded the newspaper *L'Harmonie sociale*, which came out only from 15 October to 24 December 1892. This was one of the first periodicals to demand new rights for women from a socialist perspective.

Though he was not personally close to Guesde, posterity here compels us to mention Jean Jaurès. In his preface to *Discours parlementaires*, looking back to the 1880s Jaurès referred to the 'sectarian' socialists and in particular the Guesdists:

> Upon meeting them, men of whom I had for too long been unaware exercised a sudden and violent attraction over my mind. Now I am able to control it, but despite my differences or even breaks from it, I shall never entirely rely on myself.[63]

Jaurès followed a very different path to Guesde: an ENS alumni who passed the *agrégation* in philosophy, in the mid-1880s Jaurès was a republican close to the opportunists, if increasingly open to social considerations. He never had to endure even the shortest prison sentence and he did not experience exile or even material difficulties. There was also a generational gulf separating Jaurès and Guesde. But despite these fundamental differences, the growing socialist breakthrough brought them together.[64] They entered into contact in Toulouse in 1892, where Jaurès was teaching at the university, and they had an exchange on their respective conceptions of socialism. A man made for rallies, Guesde wanted to distinguish himself from the 'stately, solemn, starched, pretentious and pompous verbiage of so many professional wordsmiths, as empty as it is flashy, as hollow as it is sonorous'.[65] Faced with Jaurès and other socialists from an academic background, he skilfully played on his past and his doctrinal purity.

Lastly, Guesde also had complex relations with Édouard Vaillant, heir to the Blanquist sensibility of French socialism. Joint initiatives soon gave way to significant coldness. There were fundamental differences, here, especially with regard to the insurrectionary tradition. Relations with the Germans also constituted a stumbling block. A brilliant intellectual, and at

[63] Jean Jaurès, op. cit., p. 2.

[64] Jean-Numa Ducange, 'Jaurès, Guesde, "infiniment plus proches l'un de l'autre qu'on ne l'a cru de leur vivant?" (Léon Blum)', *Cahiers Jaurès*, 3/2016, pp. 11–33.

[65] Adéodat Compère-Morel, op. cit., p. 259.

one time a correspondent of Feuerbach, Vaillant was held in high esteem by many German social-democrats. Added to this, he had great personal prestige as a former Communard—a direct experience which Guesde, for his part, was lacking. At the burial of Benoît Malon in early 1893, Guesde and Vaillant stood clearly at a distance from one other, as did their respective partisans.[66] Here, too, it was clear that unity was going to be a slow process.

The Institutional Road

Upon the eve of the parliamentary elections in 1893, the Guesdists' current was, without doubt, just one of the multiple sensibilities of French socialism. Yet it had also asserted itself as the most visible among them. The Guesdists' advantage lay in the early timing of their structuring process and their relatively greater ideological coherence. They already disposed of solid bases in certain regions, even while also maintaining structural weaknesses such as their near-absence of implantation in the capital. Easily identifiable and identified, the Guesdists also had a particular style of clothing, marked out by their hats and their cravats. Despite the accidents they encountered along the way, they showed incontestable dynamism through their myriad efforts: as Charles Bonnier would write in his memoirs, not without a certain nostalgia, 'this was the era of great bold initiatives'.[67]

Soon, a new era would begin for the Guesdists. Indeed, in the 1893 parliamentary elections Guesde finally made his entrance into the Palais-Bourbon. This was in step with the moment: for socialism had for the first time become a national political force, able to have an impact on the parliamentary majority. In the 'bourgeois Republic', parliament and its representatives played a decisive role, especially when these representatives spoke loudly. Guesde perfectly understood this—and despite having himself inveighed so much against parliamentarism, he became one of the great figures in the Chamber. A new page was turning in the history of socialism: though still multiform, it now bore real weight on national political life, and was already on the path to hegemony in certain regional contexts. Guesde's own trajectory fully embodied this same dynamic.

[66] AN F7/15965. Enterrement de Benoît Malon, note from 18 February 1893.

[67] Gilles Candar (ed.), *Les souvenirs de Charles Bonnier. Un intellectuel socialiste européen à la Belle Époque*, Paris, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2001, p. 193.

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CHAPTER 3

‘The Icy Frisson of the Irreconcilable’: Guesde in Parliament (1893–1898)

In 1893 the Parti Ouvrier became the Parti Ouvrier Français (POF), thus adopting the acronym with which it would enter history. That same year, its main leader, Jules Guesde, made his entry into the Chamber—one that caused a major stir. Everything now changed for Guesde: long a revolutionary militant and an exile, he now became a great national political figure, known far beyond the multiple socialist sects. On 2 November 1893 the high-circulation daily *Le Matin* published portraits of the newly elected MPs: it emphasised that Guesde was ‘famous before he became well-known. He had given his name to one of the most important factions of the socialist party.’ Nonetheless, ‘his character remained mysterious, outside of the temples which were, up till recent months, a sort of catacomb in which his co-religionists held their meetings’.

What would Guesde—this fierce critique of parliamentarism and universal suffrage—do in the august Assembly? On paper, his objective was clear: to wage ‘four years of class struggle in the Chamber’. And implacably so. The portrait which the popular novelist Michel Zévaco, author of *Pardaillan*, drew in his series devoted to the ‘men of the revolution’, faithfully represents the effect of Guesde’s interventions in the Assembly:

> He had the violent and ill-tempered pride of those obstinate types who have embarked upon some vast and perilous endeavour. … He was neither a dreamer who aspired to some ill-defined happiness … nor a poet seduced by some generous vision, nor a philosopher speculating on the gravitational pulls on the human race …; the noble idea of freedom shone in his writings

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> and in his speeches with such a pale light as to barely be distinguishable; but it was in him that the positive and geometrical idea of equality acquired its full development, its most active power, its most acute force of penetration, … At the podium in the Palais-Bourbon, he was the only one who gave the representatives of the present-day society the icy frisson of the irreconcilable.[1]

Roubaix: The 'French Manchester', a Fortress of Socialism

Before we get to Guesde's meandering speeches and the effect they had, we ought to look back to the electoral campaign that allowed him to capture the working-class constituency of Roubaix-Wattrelos. How was Guesde elected and on what basis? Why did what had failed in Marseilles work here?[2]

Guesde was not a son of this region. Was he, then, 'parachuted in'?[3] Guesde's relations with the Le Nord were nothing new. In the early 1880s he had already held a first series of talks here and he had regularly returned to Lille and Le Nord, including during election campaigns, for example in March 1888 in the run-up to the municipal elections. During one of his meetings, local militants proposed to Guesde that he move to the region as a collaborator for the newspaper *Le Cri du travailleur*. Then a bedroom was set up for him on Roubaix's Rue Vallon.[4] He thus sank roots in what would become his happiest hunting ground.

Of course, the sociological make-up of Roubaix, where a large part of the population worked in the textile industry, did not escape him. Nicknamed the 'French Manchester', in 1896 Roubaix was the eighth largest city in France in terms of population. A 'place to go to die', cruelly lacking in public amenities, it embodied the dark face of France's industrialisation. This working-class territory was characterised by very tough

[1] Michel Zévaco, 'Jules Guesde' in *Les Hommes de la Révolution*, December 1899 to January 1900, p. 11 (collection OURS).

[2] On this episode, see Philippe Deprey's well-documented, *Jules Guesde député*, Contemporary History Masters' Thesis, Université de Lille 3, October 1979.

[3] Rémi Lefebvre, 'Le socialisme pris au jeu du territoire. L'ancrage de Jules Guesde à Roubaix' in Bernard Dolez and Michel Hastings (eds.), *Le parachutage politique*, Paris, L'Harmattan (Logiques politiques), 2003, pp. 197–214.

[4] AN F7/15965. Report from the Prefect for Le Nord, 20 March 1888, addressed to the Sûreté Générale.

working conditions (sometimes meaning up to 18 hours a day on-shift) and a generally poor health situation. There were countless cases of drunkenness and alcoholism. But a certain political sociability developed in Roubaix, notably by way of meetings held in the inns and music halls. Belgian workers (around half the local population was of Belgian nationality) were used to put pressure on the local proletariat. This had such an effect on political life that some have spoken of an 'imported socialism'[5] in which these immigrants played a decisive role. They embraced the traditional forms of local working-class culture while also sticking by certain specific characteristics of the Belgian workers' movement—which we will go on to revisit.

Roubaix would soon become a strong symbol of the rootedness of Guesdist socialism. Indeed, this Northern working-class city did much to consolidate Guesdism's municipal successes, which had begun in the 1880s. In the 1892 municipal elections, the city was won to the socialists, accelerating the process of Guesde's local implantation before he ran to become Roubaix's MP the following year. This was a turning point, or even a small revolution for the socialists: indeed, it was the first town of over 100,000 inhabitants that they administered. This drove immense enthusiasm. Never in history had a city of such importance been entrusted to the workers! Henri Carette—a tavern owner and now a municipal leader—embodied this socialist and working-class pride, delighted to have become what he termed 'the mayor of the most industrial city in France'.[6]

But once the socialists had conquered Roubaix, their necessary next task was to handle its everyday affairs. Their primary job in such a context could not be a matter of overthrowing capitalism, but rather of finding remedies for the most pressing material difficulties. In pursuing their activity, the Guesdists made their local conquests into fortresses of their influence, even as they preserved a messianic rhetoric which promised better days ahead. But if socialism remained a possible objective, to be attained in the long term, this work on the ground—in the form of public interventions—inspired a certain shift in the Guesdists' outlook. Whatever the doctrinal positions that had characterised them up to this point, they became increasingly favourable towards 'municipal socialism'. A reading of the socialist press clearly indicates as much. Soon before the local

[5] Rémi Lefebvre, art. cit., p. 244.
[6] *Le journal de Roubaix*, 17 May 1892. Cited by Rémi Lefebvre, art. cit., p. 220.

election triumph of 1892, in the 26 December 1891 edition of *Le Socialiste* Guesde himself asserted that

> Declamations have definitively made way for the activity which we organise on all terrains—here to wrench the best conditions of existence from the boss class, there to dislodge the bourgeoisie from the public authorities, now directed against it.

Even such an ardent revolutionary as Paul Lafargue—an MP for Lille from 1891 to 1893—could write to Guesde, on 14 November 1892: 'What a victory in Roubaix! We have gained more than 800 votes compared to 7 August. Universal suffrage will become a tremendous weapon, now that the workers are beginning to understand how to wield it.'[7] The old tradition of distrust towards universal suffrage—inherited from Blanquism—was unravelling. With the succession of ever greater electoral triumphs, which would have been unthinkable only a few years previously, the wind was clearly changing direction. Indeed, by no means was this a specifically French phenomenon. The old German revolutionary Liebknecht said as much when he wrote to his friend Guesde in late 1892: 'I am not myself a parliamentarist, but in a crisis like the one which you are now passing through, parliamentarism is more powerful a weapon than all the others we have'.[8] Revolutionary hope was henceforth accompanied by the satisfaction of small day-to-day victories.

It is worth noting that the success in Roubaix was the result of long-term implantation strategy—one characteristic of the party's bid to give a section of the population organisational cohesion. This left a lasting mark on the socialism of Le Nord and especially the 'Mecca of socialism', Roubaix. Trade unionism was important to this effort: after the 1884 law legalising trade unions, such organisations been created in numerous localities across Le Nord, and the members of the POF strongly supported their development. More broadly, militants inspired by a powerful sense of voluntarism invaded the sites of working-class organisation and sociability. The cooperatives especially symbolised the cross-over between politics and everyday life: according to historian Robert Baker, we can identify a parallel advance in the implantation of the cooperatives and of the POF itself.[9]

[7] IISG J. G. Letter from Paul Lafargue to Jules Guesde, 14 November 1892.

[8] IISG J. G. Letter from Wilhelm Liebknecht to Jules Guesde, 25 December 1892.

[9] Robert P. Baker, 'Socialism in the Nord, 1880–1914: A Regional View of the French Socialist Movement', *International Review of Social History*, 1967, pp. 357–389.

Cooperatives in France more often than not developed independently of socialist currents. But here there was a tight bind subordinating the cooperatives to the party—as adopted from the Belgian model. Party, union, cooperatives, mutual funds, labour exchanges: in Roubaix, political militants helped unite all of these structures, though in the rest of the country they often followed very distinct paths. The Guesdists' use of a large cooperative known as 'La Paix' symbolised this symbiosis, characteristic of the Guesdism of Le Nord. The political scientists Paula Cossart and Julien Talpin have studied the foundational importance of this cooperative for the 'Mecca' of socialism[10]: indeed, from 1887 it became closely linked to the POF. Officially, like any other cooperative, it above all set itself an economic role, for instance providing low-cost bread and coal. But it transformed into a site of encounter, of passage, where *roubaisiens* who belonged to the party or were close to it crossed paths. This helped to tighten the bonds between the Guesdists and a growing segment of the population. These types of cooperatives were, indeed, 'spaces for the interlacing of politics and ordinary sociability'.[11]

In short, as Michel Offerlé aptly notes, 'when the Guesdists began to conquer Le Nord, they did so first and foremost thanks to the web of cooperatives, unions and taverns'.[12] This dense network made it possible to strongly integrate militants into organised structures: and it was on the basis of these conquests that Guesde would become the herald of Northern socialism that entered history.

Conquest

Now we can turn to the election campaign of 1893, which was waged with great enthusiasm following the municipal contests of 1892. In his 'profession of faith' Guesde called for *roubasiens* to build on the striking success of the previous year:

[10] Paula Cossart and Julien Talpin, 'Les Maisons du Peuple comme espaces de politisation. Étude de la coopérative ouvrière la paix à Roubaix (1885–1914)', *Revue française de science politique*, 4/2012, pp. 583–610.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Michel Offerlé 'Mobilisation électorale et invention du citoyen. L'exemple du milieu urbain français à la fin du 19e siècle', in Daniel Gaxie (ed.), *Explications du vote. Un bilan des études électorales en France*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 1985, p. 170.

> It is for you to show, with your votes, on 20 August, if working-class and peasant France has fooled itself in counting on Roubaix to make a great step toward its political and economic liberation, barely two years after it triumphantly installed socialism in its Town Hall, or if—as I want to hope—conscious of your right and your duty, you intend to open up a new era for humanity.[13]

Nothing could rein in Guesde's enthusiasm. In this electoral dynamic he even saw a symptom of the final and imminent crisis of capitalism. Was this an error of diagnosis? Doubtless, with the benefit of hindsight, it was. But let's turn back to the context of 1893: and an election that took place amidst the Panama scandal, a gigantic corruption case which discredited a large number of politicians from the traditional parties. On 22 November 1892, Lafargue confidently wrote to Guesde: 'Panama will save us by sinking the opportunists'.[14] Two months later to the day, the socialists published a manifesto against the corruption of the system and its representatives. The socialists' denunciation of corrupt practices played to their advantage, ahead of parliamentary elections slated for August–September.[15] For Marxist socialists like Guesde, Panama showed that the system was nearing its end, as the corruption it engendered came out into the light of day. At the more local level, a major strike fuelled the dynamism of Guesde's campaign.

Underestimating the strength of the roots that the republicans had sunk starting in the 1880s, Guesde bet that his entry into the Palais-Bourbon would be but one of multiple factors hurrying along the social revolution. His oppositional rhetoric proved to be a real mobilising force, as he promised a destitute, exploited and out-of-work population the imminent arrival of a better world. Reaping the fruits of his previous campaign for parliament, Guesde again held a long series of meetings and rallies. The police commissar recognised what was going on, and highlighted Guesde's growing popularity: 'Groups of workers remember the activity that Guesde had carried out during the election period and his ceaseless devotion to the proletarian cause. He alone, it was said, could set the Radical Party into disarray and rally all the workers' votes under his

[13] Jules Guesde, *Quatre ans de lutte de classe à la Chambre: 1893–1898*, Paris, G. Jacques, 1901, vol. 1, p. X.

[14] ISG J.G. Letter from Paul Lafargue ato Jules Guesde, 22 November 1892.

[15] Frédéric Monier, *Corruption et politique: rien de nouveau?,* Paris, Armand Colin, 2011.

own name.'[16] Guesde fervidly denounced the exploitation of which the proletariat was the victim. Drawing a few examples from Deville's abridged version of *Capital*, he was well-armed for an electoral campaign in which all manner of hatred was unleashed against him. Historian Madeleine Rebérioux identifies a strength of Guesdist-origin socialist propaganda that went beyond repetitive and dogmatic formulas. More than just correct doctrine, Guesdism 'also fed, perhaps above all, on an impassioned evocation of the tragic lives of the workers, free only to die of hunger …'.[17]

Guesde faced tough adversaries: a certain Vienne (a worker backed by the local bosses), Deschamps (belonging to the nationalist camp), Naessens (a democratic republican) and lastly an anarchist—who recommended that everyone abstain! Decisively, the radical republicans did not stand any candidates, having made a de facto decision not to oppose Guesde. This made his task considerably easier. The nationalist right tore into him, accusing him of being the Prussians' candidate. It invoked his ties with German social democracy *ad nauseam*, playing on the negative memories of the German occupation of 1870. He had, they claimed, sold out to the enemy—invoking as proof the help the SPD had given him. 'The German workers' party has sent 2500 francs to its French brothers as a subsidy for their electoral kitty.' For them, he was a traitor in the making: 'You will not vote for this swindler so contemptible as to betray his country and to accept, as the price for his duplicity, the money of those who killed your sons and slit your wives' throats'.[18] Guesde replied sharply and skilfully: he insisted German social democracy would hand back Alsace-Lorraine to its people, meaning, to France, the vanguard of humanity. He adopted the notes of the republican defence of 1870 to mobilise voters, showing an ardent patriotism. Yet he did not abandon his internationalist convictions, and instead persisted in foregrounding his ties with the German socialists.

Guesde thus thwarted his adversary's line of attack, for the nationalists were not able to put up anything against him other than the harshness of their own revanchism. Behind the scenes, however, there were real problems with the German 'brothers'. On 5 June 1893, Lafargue wrote to Guesde that '*Vorwärts*[19] has deleted the line where I talked about the

[16] Archives Départementales du Nord (henceforth ADN), M 154/172. Report by the special commissioner for Tourcoing.

[17] Madeleine Rebérioux, 'Le guesdisme', *Bulletin de la société d'études jaurésiennes*, no. 50, 1973, p. 4.

[18] ADN, M/37/33. Leaflets from the 1893 election campaign.

[19] The SPD's Berlin daily.

annexation of Alsace-Lorraine'.[20] This seemed far from the time—even just shortly before this campaign—when Engels had insisted that 'There is no Alsatian question between the French and German socialists'.[21] At the height of the campaign, Guesde moreover granted an interview to *Le Figaro* on 17 June 1893 where he argued that 'the idea of the *patrie* is by no means undermined by this internationalism. … We—whose internationalism is denatured, if not calumnied, transformed into statelessness—are in reality the only true patriots.' The same day in *Le Socialiste* he vaunted the merits of 'this double cry that makes up just one: vive l'Internationale! Vive la France!' In short, there was no longer reason to be abstract about defending the countries where the socialists were progressing. To be a socialist was also to be a patriot. Tellingly, this same year the Parti Ouvrier became the Parti Ouvrier Français.

Should we see this as an 'electoralist' turn, a bid to get a hearing from the wider electorate? Did it mean becoming more strongly integrated into the political game? Or was it a sincere rebalancing operation, taking national realities into account? All these factors probably ought to be considered. Henceforth Guesde and his friends would move back and forth on this question, depending on the period and what public they were addressing. Nonetheless, the defence of the nation was now an element integrated into their rhetoric, notably during electoral campaigns.

Guesde was described not only as a Prussian agent but also as a Paris politician lacking any real local ties. He retorted that the most important thing, in France as elsewhere, was the great division between social classes, between workers and bosses. He put his personality on display, together with his past, his role as the party's creator and as a driving force of socialism, his years in prison and exile and his longstanding devotion in service of the proletariat. He combined all this with immediate demands: naturally including the eight-hour day, the great working-class demand of this era. He also stood for a ban on child labour for under-14s, equal wages for men and women, and the recognition of the boss's responsibility in the case of accidents. Finally, he continued to call for the general arming of the people—as against a professionalised army considered to be under the command of the bourgeois state—and the development of a police force that would be managed at the local level. This bore clear traces of the legacy of the Paris Commune. This was, therefore, above all a national-level

[20] IISG J. G. Letter from Paul Lafargue to Jules Guesde, 5 June 1893.
[21] Friedrich Engels, 'Situation politique de l'Europe', *Le Socialiste*, 6 November 1886.

campaign, which leading lights of other socialist sensibilities came to support, in order to bolster his legitimacy. Alexandre Millerand thus carried out a series of talks in Calais and then in Le Nord together with Guesde and Lafargue, before heading South to continue 'the necessary propaganda work' of the 'missionaries or travelling salesmen' of socialism.[22]

In the end, after a hard-fought campaign Guesde won a clear victory. Taking close to 7000 votes, he surpassed 50 per cent support even in the first round, as against Vienne (32.64 per cent), Deschamps (15.65 per cent) and Naessens (1.23 per cent). Guesde hailed this 'revolutionary' victory—one brought by universal suffrage. His success immediately prompted many of his voters to write to him with their grievances; in his private archives we find a number of letters from workers addressing him more or less well-founded requests to help the most destitute. At the international level, in 1893 alone he received a large number of letters from socialist leaders around the world, from the German Bebel to the Russian Plekhanov, the Romanian Rakovsky and the Spaniard Iglesias. These were almost all short missives, often to thank him for this fine victory and to request a short article for the foreign socialist press, explaining the reasons for his victory. Guesde wanted to make this success into a symbol and an example. In an August 1893 letter of thanks to his voters, Guesde presented himself as the bridge to the socialist humanity that was now being built: 'Roubaix has become the model commune, I was going to say the holy city, for proletarians everywhere'.

Socialism in the National Assembly

In 1944 Bracke cited an account of the 1890s by Marcel Sembat, which emphasised the extraordinary echo of Jules Guesde's speeches. According to this account, Guesde made the voice of the oppressed echo throughout the parliamentary chamber itself: 'When Guesde was at the podium, amidst the tumult of interruptions, at certain moments one had the illusion that the wall was opening up behind the chairman and that one could see the proletariat with its demands entering through the breach'.[23]

An exceptional orator, Guesde was able to foreground his unique capacity as a spokesman for the workers, thus distinguishing him from

[22] *La Petite République*, 22 March 1893.

[23] Bracke, preface to Jules Guesde, *Socialisme. Double réponse à MM.De Mun et Paul Deschanel*, Paris, 1944, p. 5.

many other MPs. Without explicitly formulating or theorising this, he presented himself as a new man, against the old traditional parliamentary elites. The socialists of this era could mobilise what Michel Offerlé calls 'illegitimacy as legitimation'.[24] The socialists thus made a virtue of the fact that they were the only force to present candidates from popular backgrounds, allowing them to take on political responsibilities. Guesde did not, of course, hail from working-class origins and had almost no political capital other than that provided by his ideology and his party. But in this era, this counted a great deal—all the more so given that Guesde could also make use of other elements of a capital which he had long been building up. After all, he was a former political prisoner, an exile, a man who had for years had contacts with political representatives across Europe, and so on. Though Guesde was not 'of the people', he was, indeed, 'illegitimate' by comparison with the republican notables. From this point of view, he was a new man, presenting himself as the bearer of the growing socialist idea. His talents as a debater and orator did the rest, bringing his qualities into relief.

What is more, his entrance into the Chamber owed nothing to chance. This also set it apart from Lafargue's by-election victory in 1891, which stemmed from a particular and local political context—indeed, Lafargue went down to defeat in the 1893 general election. Guesde's success was part of a wider dynamic, strengthening his conviction that he was at the forward outposts of French politics.

Indeed, the history of parliamentary socialism truly began at the moment that Guesde made his entry into the Palais-Bourbon. The 1893 elections constituted a major turning point in the political history of the Third Republic. For the first time, fifty-odd MPs who identified as 'socialists' made their entry into the parliamentary chamber. Jean Jaurès had been returned to the National Assembly already in January, thanks to a by-election, this time standing on the basis of the Parti Ouvrier's programme. The Blanquist Édouard Vaillant made up part of the same cohort. All of them had undoubtedly benefited from the context of profound crisis in the Third Republic.

But how did Guesde—the rebel, the exile, the revolutionary, forever in opposition—experience life as an MP? In the first place we ought to emphasise one essential factor in the everyday life of the newly elected

[24] Michel Offerlé, 'Illégitimité et légitimation du personnel politique ouvrier en France avant 1914', *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 4/1984, p. 693.

deputy. Finally coming out of hardship, Guesde could breathe. Long immersed in the worst material difficulties, he could now stay afloat, thanks to the parliamentary indemnity provided for the Republic's elected officials. He bought a home in the inner periphery of Paris, in Garenne-Bezons (today, Garenne-Colombes): 'a small house surrounded by a neatly-maintained little garden' where he received journalists and his friends.[25] A journalist for *Le Figaro* described him as a 'good father, a good husband, a musician, a poet in his spare time and a great friend of cats'.[26] Nonetheless, his personal problems persisted: his fragile health, frequently mentioned in the socialist press, caused the cancellation of several planned series of talks. His state of health regularly inspired rumours of his death, especially in Le Nord, where far-right press like Drumont's *la Libre Parole* had a certain readership.[27] Guesde repeatedly headed to Cette (Sète) together with comrades of his who had been elected at the local level, in order to restore his health. Taking rest in this region, would stop all political activity for several weeks at a time.[28]

Beyond his personal problems, Guesde's conception of his office as an MP was anything but that of a locally rooted notable, as many others were. Rather, he considered himself the disinterested servant of the proletariat as a whole, as mandated by the Parti Ouvrier. For him, Parliament was above all a site of propaganda: when *le Matin* asked him what role he ascribed to his office, he replied: 'Far be it from us to believe the chimera that our social revolution can be accomplished within the parliamentary and constitutional framework!'[29] During his term in office, the building of the party continued. This was itself his stated objective—more often than not he presented himself as the 'bearer of the Parti Ouvrier's programme'.[30] Whenever he did mention Roubaix's local affairs, he mostly did so in order to illustrate some general argument concerning the working class as a whole.

This is not to accuse Guesde of absenteeism. He regularly intervened in parliament, when his health allowed it. He played along with the parliamentary game, even as he maintained his zeal for denouncing capitalism.

[25] The house is described by Marcel Hutin, in 'M. Jules Guesde, réformateur général', *Le Figaro*, 29 March 1894.

[26] Paul Bosq, 'M. Jules Guesde', *Le Figaro*, 20 June 1896.

[27] *La Libre Parole*, 16 May 1896.

[28] AN F7/15965. Report of 18 March 1895.

[29] *Le Matin*, 20 November 1893.

[30] Jules Guesde, *Quatre ans...*, op. cit., p. 5.

He virulently confronted the 'bourgeois' politicians—and the feeling was mutual!—but it would be wrong to claim that he did this only by hammering away at his doctrine, repeating himself without any nuance. Rather, he proved capable of deploying many concrete examples, which he articulated with his theories; he took account of the living conditions of the most modest French citizens, indeed lyrically evoking the proletarians of the textile industry who had sent him to the Palais-Bourbon. Repeatedly emphasising the importance of the 'social problem', 'the problem of this century',[31] he replied point by point to the MPs who denied the existence of social classes and of capitalist exploitation. The explanation of the world inspired by Marxism made its clamorous entry into the Chamber. Indeed, many of Guesde's interventions were real mini-treatises of Marxist pedagogy, frequently invoking the implacable law of surplus-value. The present order was not acceptable, and Guesde shared his dream of another world: 'For that reason the time has come for human freedom'.[32] He prompted theoretical reflection and debates that extended much further than the subject that had initially been put on the agenda. He cited Marx and other theorists, or rather drew a few formulas by paraphrasing them more or less faithfully, as well as mentioning economic studies giving account of working-class deprivation, whether produced by academics or other bodies. Yet as his political adversaries noted, he tended to minimise the fact that he had been elected for a specific and very working-class constituency, which did not reflect the whole sociology of France of the time. The tendency to remain within the bounds of a discourse that could not extend beyond certain fractions of the population was, without doubt, one of Guesde's limits.

Yet whenever Guesde spoke, his voice strongly made itself heard. He repeatedly moved back-and-forth between the local, national and sometimes international levels. For example, he bitterly crossed swords with Jules Méline and his protectionist tariff in the session of 19 February 1894:

> Mr. Meline, a protectionist to the last when it comes to the different factions of the property-owning class, suddenly becomes a free-trader when it comes to the commodity labour, the workers' work.[33]

[31] Ibid., p. 134.
[32] Ibid., p. 150.
[33] Ibid., p. 5.

Painting a catastrophist picture of the contemporary situation, he continued to defend the 'iron law of wages', according to which the worker was only given the minimum necessary in order to survive. He professed his atheism, to the great scandal of many MPs who accused him of whipping up hatred and laying the ground for civil war. He called for state intervention, correcting the more anti-statist claims he had made in the past, though he nonetheless continued to reaffirm the Marxist objective of the disappearance of the state: hence 'In the society of tomorrow, with the classes having disappeared in favour of social equality, there will no longer be place for a state'.[34] When Guesde spoke on this subject, the conservative benches swung between either hilarity or fear.

Firmly attached to questions of doctrine, Guesde nonetheless upheld immediate working-class demands: most of the nineteen big speeches of his first term were dedicated to these latter. By no means was passing legislation some mere detail for Guesde: for instance, he fought for the eight-hour law, where 'legislative or social intervention is essential'.[35] In backing up his arguments he drew on many concrete examples taken from various books and reports. For instance, he had no hesitation in citing Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, author of *La question ouvrière au dix-neuvième siècle*, in order to turn him to his own advantage. This latter was a liberal economist with a prestigious chair at the Collège de France, with whom Guesde constantly polemicised.

Guesde insisted on the effectiveness of legislation: 'Open the way, make concessions, grant the working class what it demands from you and has every right to demand of you; for not only will present-day society not suffer from the reform in question, but it will benefit from it.'[36] He opposed the 'Villainous Laws' against the anarchists, even as he damned these latters' own activity as harmful.

He also used parliament in order to challenge the prefect's cancellation of decisions which the Roubaix municipality had taken in favour of the workers. The city had established a low-cost pharmaceutical service as well as an office providing free legal consultations. Faced with a largely hostile National Assembly, Guesde insisted that Roubaix was more advanced than the nation as a whole, indicating the path that the French Republic would have to follow over the years to come. He profited from this to vaunt the

[34] Ibid., vol. II, p. 29.
[35] Ibid., p. 50.
[36] Ibid., p. 73.

merits of municipal autonomy from the bourgeois state, here rediscovering the inspiration of the Paris Commune of 1871. He looked back in time and revisited the history of property and of the gradual dispossession of the poor to the benefit of the rich, gradually leading to a radical opposition between two social classes, proletariat and bourgeoisie. Sometimes Guesde gave real history lessons, in this regard resembling other republican deputies of the time. To the socialists there belonged a 'great past' of utopias, which it was now the moment to realise, thanks to the party:

> We do not disavow—indeed, we will never disavow—the communists of yesteryear. Going back even beyond the Babouvists, you should, indeed, associate us with Plato's *Republic*, Thomas More's *Utopia*, Campanella's *City of the Sun*. We glory in making all this great past our own; we claim as our own prehistoric tradition the great communist dream of all those who struggled, by hand or by brain, for the common happiness or welfare.[37]

Like many of his parliamentary colleagues, Guesde made frequent reference to the history of the French Revolution, especially to Robespierre and Babeuf. Considering the period running from 1789 to 1794 as a bourgeois revolution, he regularly expounded the argument that while during the Revolution the bourgeoisie had dared to lead from the front, it was now up for the proletariat to realise what the bourgeoisie no longer wanted. For example, he cited the plan for national education written by Saint-Fargeau and read by Robespierre at the Convention on 15 July 1793. He then insisted:

> This debt of the Republic's, you have paid in in part, but only in part; you paid it by half when you organised free and compulsory primary education. Now it is time to pay the other half, to fully acquit yourselves of this debt, by giving our children, all our children, food and clothing, with the aid of a national fund for school canteens.[38]

Alongside this exaltation of the Revolution's actions, Guesde accorded a significant place to legislative intervention. Was he discovering the possibility that Parliament itself could mount major reforms? In one of his interventions he specified

[37] Ibid., Vol. II, p. 64.
[38] Ibid., pp. 206–7.

> To vote for a workers' protection bill is to recognise the classes. … Yes, the day that you vote for such a bill, you affirm that there is an oppressed, exploited class, that there are men who possess nothing, not possessing even their own selves, reduced to the daily sale of their labour power such that they might not die.[39]

Legislative action could thus help recognition that the class struggle did, indeed, exist. Did this mean that Guesde had abandoned the idea of revolutionary overthrow? He ended one speech in the 19 July 1894 session asserting that it would be possible to introduce the Social Republic by way of an electoral majority:

> Given your laws of both yesterday and tomorrow, and in opposition to them, in 1898 there will be two, perhaps three million of us. It is we who, becoming the majority, will resume the work of the Revolution which you have deserted, and who will finally build the true Republic, the Social Republic![40]

Elsewhere, he stated that he would prefer 'to be in a Social Republic rather than the bosses' monarchy'. No longer did there seem to be any question of drawing an equivalence between monarchy and Republic. The Republic would have to be a social one: but even if Guesde did not say it explicitly, he did imply that despite everything it was better to be under a Republic than a monarchy. This was a real change of direction compared to previous years. In this same spirit, Guesde evoked the possibility of a 'peaceful, legal revolution',[41] on condition that there was no provocation to violence from the conservatives and the bosses. This latter situation could indeed lead to a 'violent revolution'—but only as a reactive measure.

All these citations are taken from Guesde's speeches in the Assembly; doubtless he played a certain legalistic card in order to make himself heard and to avoid the risk of marginalisation. But the idea of a peaceful transition to socialism was now more widely imagined in the international workers' movement, and Guesde's own line of argument corresponded to this shift. During this same parliamentary term, in the pages of *Le Socialiste* Charles Bonnier published a text by Engels opening up to the possibility

[39] Ibid., p. 255.
[40] Ibid., pp. 89–90.
[41] Ibid., p. 183.

of a path to socialism that could do without the barricades.[42] This text, which Engels wrote shortly before his death, as the preface to a new edition of Marx's *Class Struggles in France 1848–1850*, served as a political testament. Indeed, it was bowdlerised by the SPD leadership at the time, in order to present it as a simple renunciation of revolution, and it sparked widespread debate. But in this context, Engels's arguments did undeniably push in the direction of a form of legalism and a critique of the path of insurrection. Guesde must have got to know this text by way of *Le Socialiste*, certainly helping to influence his own point of view.

The speeches here cited were not published in full until 1899, after the end of Guesde's first term as an MP. But already in 1893–1898, many militants could read something of Guesde, in turn consolidating him in his leadership of his current. His speeches were often reproduced in the national and provincial socialist press, whether in extracts or in paraphrased form. Also worth underlining is the fact that some of Guesde's speeches were printed in pamphlet form at the end of his term. The most significant pamphlet, printed in Roubaix, was entitled *Le parti ouvrier et son action parlementaire 1893–1898*.[43] This text is interesting for an understanding what the party chose to foreground in speaking to militants, sympathisers and Guesde's voters. The introduction emphasised that Guesde's parliamentary mandate 'was in his hands nothing but a further weapon for the defence of labour's rights and interests'. It also detailed the bills to which he had given his backing. For example, when it referred to the emblematic eight-hour bill, which Guesde had supported robustly, it highlighted the growing number of MPs who were ready to vote for it, indeed 'an imposing and significant minority, which will become a majority and succeed in the next legislature, if working-class France does its duty in a few weeks' time'. In the part dedicated 'to our soldiers', we can read that 'Jules Guesde wants an all-powerful, invincible France able to stand up to the joined forces of capitalist Europe, just as it stood up to the Holy Alliance of kings, popes and tsars a century ago'. France had to be defended—in an internationalist perspective, of course:

[42] 'La provocation', *Le Socialiste*, 14 April 1895.

[43] *Le parti ouvrier et son action parlementaire 1893–1898, les votes de Jules Guesde*, Roubaix, Imprimerie spéciale du Parti Ouvrier Français, 1898.

> A day will come where, after a pact among the working classes of Europe—as masters of their respective governments—the nightmare of an international massacre, which so weighs on the end of this century, will be dissipated forever.[44]

But for now, matters were clear:

> Jules Guesde was in the front rank of this socialist minority, patriots truly worthy of the name, who in all circumstances, amidst the cowardice of some and the betrayals of others, saved the honour of the Republic and of the France of the Revolution.

An internationalist, then, who did not want to leave 'the honour of the Republic and of France' up to others. Here, too, a certain pragmatism seems to have won out: Guesde now defended the 'honour' of a regime which he had not hesitated to shout down with some frequency only a few years earlier.

Guesde the Pragmatist?

Was Guesde evolving towards a pragmatic, patriotic and gradualist socialism? Interrogating his relationship with Jaurès—a fervent republican—can perhaps allow us a better understanding of these changes. In parliament, notably on the question of Méline tariff, Guesde regularly turned to Jaurès for backing, and indeed repeatedly cited him approvingly in his parliamentary speeches. The two men were close, at this point, and Guesde's development clearly owed something to his exchanges with MPs of a republican background such as Jaurès. In turn, Jaurès adopted part of the Guesdists' rhetoric on the class struggle. Of course, he would never join the POF, and in 1894 he crossed swords with Lafargue over their respective notions of 'idealism and materialism in the conception of history', thus showing what separated him from Guesde and his partisans.[45] Jaurès would never fall in line with the economic theses and the simplistic materialism of his Guesdist comrades. He elaborated a humanism standing above class divides, which would remain fundamentally alien to the Guesdists. Nonetheless, at this point Jaurès did, indeed, accept cooperation with them. Socialist unity—a still-distant horizon in this era—demanded as

[44] Ibid., p. 28.

[45] Jean Jaurès, Paul Lafargue, *Idéalisme et matérialisme dans la conception de l'histoire*, Paris, Publication du groupe des étudiants collectivistes, 1895.

much. In the 1893 elections, *Le Socialiste* presented Jaurès as an MP for the party: the votes that allowed his election in Carmaux were counted as support for the POF, pure and simple.

These closer relations were also demonstrated by the articles that Jaurès published in *Le Socialiste* between 1893 and 1896. These articles were very 'class-struggle' in tone: Jaurès railed against the boss of the Carmaux glassworks and the police repression of striking workers.[46] After Engels read Jaurès's articles, soon before his death, he wrote to Lafargue that 'Jaures seems full of good will'.[47] Other letters also speak to these good relations. There were no few cases of the pair appearing side by side at joint meetings in support of striking workers. This was the case, for example, in September 1894 in Rive-de-Gier, a small town between Saint-Étienne and Lyon, where the two popular tribunes came to support the striking glassworkers, 'upstanding citizens' who 'for seven months … have been fighting against a hunger-merchant who threw 1,200 families onto the street'.[48]

Doubtless, a key moment in these strengthening relations came with the POF congress held in Nantes in 1894. According to the memoir of Alexandre Zévaès, a young collectivist student born in 1873 who became one of Guesde's closest collaborators, this was the great moment of harmony between the two socialist MPs.[49] They appeared together on the platform at the congress: Jaurès, as we have said, was elected on the basis of the POF's programme, and at the congress he even chaired one of the sessions. This latter marked a turning point on the agrarian question. Already in his 1893 programme Guesde had addressed himself to 'small industrialists and small traders', victims of competition from larger outfits. The party's doctrine proved flexible when it came to small private property: the land was for the peasants, according to Lafargue, just as the scalpel was for the surgeon. As they embarked on 'the conquest of the *terroirs*' the socialists now bet on the defence of the 'little' against the 'big', as opposed to the expropriation of the former by the latter—the process which, according to Engels's analysis, would surely lead to the generalisation of wage-labour in the farms and fields. Here, Lafargue showed real

[46] Madeleine Rebérioux, 'La collaboration de Jaurès au *Socialiste* de Jules Guesde', *Bulletin de la société d'études jaurésiennes*, no. 4, January–March 1962, pp. 14–15.

[47] Friedrich Engels to Paul Lafargue, 22 January 1885, in Friedrich Engels and Paul Lafargue, *Correspondances*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, Vol. III, 1959, p. 394.

[48] *Le Peuple de Lyon*, 27 September 1894 (Archives départementales de la Loire, 92 M 55).

[49] Alexandre Zévaès, 'Jaurès et Guesde', *Revue de Paris*, July 1936, pp. 79–111.

sensitivity to a constant of French history, a path which the socialists and communists of the twentieth century would also themselves follow.[50] Guesde showed himself rather circumspect about this bold turn, but often adopted this line of argument in his own propaganda. Engels was annoyed by what he considered an over-estimation of the peasantry: at Bebel's request, he wrote an article critical of these changes. Was this opportunism? In a France that remained mostly rural, there was an evident electoral wager to be made, especially now that Guesde and his allies were ever more reliant on universal suffrage. This choice perhaps also owed to a form of historical consciousness: the socialists were betting on the continuity in the tradition of revolutionary *jacqueries* by the small peasants. In a rare instance of dissent, two figures close to Guesde, Deville and Bonnier, defied the 'general' Engels on this point, showing how important this debate was for the French.[51]

There was also a moment of unity shortly afterward, concerning what attitude to adopt faced with the investiture of the Radical Léon Bourgeois's government in 1895–1896. Despite their criticisms, the socialists supported this republican's reforming efforts. There was no question of 'letting things get worse, so they could get better', showing no interest for who led the majority in parliament. Again in 1896, the 'Banquet of Saint-Maindé' under the aegis of Alexandre Millerand celebrated the socialists' municipal-level victories and called for the intensification of this movement, while Jules Méline—whom the socialists considered a reactionary—took over from Léon Bourgeois. Guesde spoke side-by-side with other leading lights of socialism, from Jaurès to Vaillant and Allemane. Unity seemed to be on the march. In conformity with what he was himself saying in Parliament, Guesde did not formulate critiques of the more reformist positions expressed at this moment. He upheld the 'need for the working class, once victorious, to know exactly what it wants to do with its victory'. Victory also meant—perhaps not exclusively, of course—electoral victory. The Guesdists played a full part in this movement, building on the early successes. Notably, in 1896 they conquered the great industrial and working-class city of Lille, henceforth led by Gustave Delory. As was often

[50] Gilles Candar and Jean-Numa Ducange, 'Paul Lafargue. La propriété paysanne et l'évolution économique', *Cahiers Jaurès*, no. 195–196, January–June 2010, pp. 71–80.

[51] *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe*, I/32, 1891–1895, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, (Apparat), 2010, p. 1117. See also Gilles Candar (ed.), *Les souvenirs de Charles Bonnier. Un intellectuel socialiste européen à la Belle Époque*, Paris, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2001, p. 206.

the case following an electoral triumph, the Guesdists' enthusiasm was set alight by this result—they saw it as the beginning of a process that nothing could stop. In an article for the 3 January 1897 issue of *Le Socialiste* entitled 'La dictature du prolétariat', Charles Bonnier went so far as to forcefully evoke 'the dictatorship of the proletariat in a region of France'—here referring to the conquest of Lille! Nonetheless, it was in fact an alliance with the Radicals that had allowed this result; the mayor's first deputy was a Radical, Dr. Debierre.

The convergences between the socialists were also built on their efforts to counter 'ultra-left' competition: at the international level, Jaurès and Guesde again united at the London Congress of the International in 1896, in order to expel the anarchists.[52] Guesde developed a particular aversion to anything that looked like anarchism. Yet already in 1895, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) had been founded, and soon the driving force within its ranks was a revolutionary syndicalist current which vehemently rejected the Guesdist conception of the party. The Roubaix MP affirmed a clear position towards the unions, which so jealously defended their independence from political parties—indeed, this became one of the most enduring markers of the Guesdist sensibility. Fundamentally, what Guesde admired was the German model—or, even closer to his constituency, the Belgian model, as applied to local realities. He very clearly defended this model in his speech at the International's London Congress in 1896 and did not thereupon change his position one iota, up to his death. The trade unions did have their role to play, but it could only be defensive and specific to their own battles; they alone could certainly not present themselves as the outline of the future society. Indifferent or even hostile to calls for the general strike and to the mythology surrounding the revolutionary syndicalism which soon took over the CGT, Guesde assigned but a limited role to the unions. In return, the CGT syndicalists made Guesde and his partisans their preferred *bêtes noires*.[53] Émile Pouget, one of the great driving forces behind the union, even published a selection of *Variations guesdistes* in 1897, in which he gathered numerous citations of Guesde's hostile to the CGT, together

[52] Michel Launay, 'Jaurès et Guesde d'après des documents inédits', *Bulletin de la société d'études jaurésiennes*, no. 4, January–March 1962, pp. 10–13.

[53] Guillaume Davranche, 'Pelloutier, Pouget, Hamon, Lazare et le retour de l'anarchisme au socialisme (1893–1900)', *Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique*, no. 110, 2009, pp. 139–161.

with commentary. In his introduction to these 'variations', Pouget looked back to the history of the First International and the activity of Marx and the Marxists—the 'authoritarians'. Pouget targeted Guesde all the more sharply given that—as he well knew—he had once been an anarchist. There was a dressing-down for the traitor Guesde: 'One excellent recruit for Marx was Jules Guesde. Before he found his path to Damascus and became the St. Paul of Marxism, this figure had flirted with the anarchists.'[54] Now, according to Pouget, the Guesdists were lost to the cause: 'the mania to govern has turned their heads, and their horizon is limited to the four walls of the chamber of deputies'.[55]

Evidently, what was at issue in the battle between the socialists and the CGT was the question of who would win hegemony over working-class layers. But there was also a more specific fight between the Guesdists and the syndicalists. Of course, the two clashed frontally on the question of politics, of which they had clearly different conceptions. But they shared the 'separatist' horizon inherited from the old workers' associationism: revolutionary socialism (or now, syndicalism) had to remain independent from the bourgeois world. A divide very quickly opened up when it came to the concrete practice of this separatism: where the Guesdists made full use of institutions and fetishised the party, the CGT vilified the parliamentary system. Their mutual hostility proved stubborn, though realities at the local level were often less bruising; militants could be in both the POF and the CGT, often in contradiction with the great declarations made by national congresses.

Structuring the Guesdist Current: An Enduring Task

Despite the improved ties we have mentioned, the perspective of future unity between the socialists posed the problem of which current would take over the leadership. A surveillance report in 1895 remarked that 'Mr. Guesde's efforts are growing each day. At root, their goal is not to allow the development of Mr. Jaurès's efforts, as he silently prepares his batteries.'[56] Guesde and his allies pursued the greater implantation and structuring of their current, including by developing their provincial-level

[54] Émile Pouget, *Variations guesdistes*, Paris, Bureaux de la Sociale, 1897, pp. 5–6.
[55] Ibid., p. 8.
[56] N F7/15965, Note of 27 May 1895.

press—a decisively important medium now enjoying strong growth. There was *Le Réveil du Nord* (Lille), *L'Égalité* (Roubaix), *Le Peuple* (Lyon), *Le socialiste de la Manche* (Cherbourg), *La République sociale* (Narbonne), *Le socialiste cettois*, *Le Socialiste breton* and so on. All of them adopted the orientation fixed by *Le Socialiste*, with local variations.

In these operations, friendships counted for a lot: indeed, during these years of intense debates, Guesde also suffered from his multiple illnesses. His close friends brought him comfort and the warmth of his relations with his collaborators was manifest. Some splits were all the more brutal for this reason. Among his collaborators, as well as Lafargue, Bonnier again occupied a choice role, as an ever-valuable intermediary with the German social-democrats. It was through Bonnier that Guesde received the letters sent him by Clara Zetkin. Above all, he informed Guesde and advised him about what was going on in socialism internationally. Indeed, an exhaustive consultation of Guesde's correspondence leaves no room for doubt. Here, we find that a very large majority of the letters he received came from within France. As compared to the previous period, his perspective on the situation abroad even seems to have narrowed somewhat. But two remarks need adding to this. On the one hand, the German social-democrats' own main correspondents were Germans. Karl Kautsky could read and write in French without difficulty, but he mainly received letters from Germany and Austria.[57] On the other hand, Guesde exchanged letters with a few French correspondents well informed about international debates and who served as intermediaries between him and the German social-democrats. Lastly, we ought not forget that he in a sense had an internationalist 'mandate', as an MP for a constituency adjoining Belgium. For example, at the beginning of the year he received the editor of Ghent's *Vooruit*.[58] He also established ties with Polish socialists—notably London-based exiles—in order to try to resist the Franco-Russian alliance.[59] His past and his experience as an exile made him sensitive to the fate of such socialist pariahs: he helped Russian and Polish exiles to hide in Paris under fake names and false addresses, in order to foil the police.[60]

[57] Moira Donald, 'Workers of the World Unite?' in Martin H. Geyeret and Johannes Paulmann (eds.), *The Mechanics of Internationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 177–204.

[58] AN F7/15965. Note of 5 January 1893.

[59] AN F7/15965. Note of 12 September 1895.

[60] AN F7/15965. Report of 10 June 1896.

Conversely, it seems that, like most socialists of his time, he was little-sensitive to the fate of the populations colonised by France. Doubtless, the Romilly Congress of 1895 did condemn colonial expeditions and their atrocities, but it did so mainly on account of the negative repercussions for French workers, in the metropolis itself. It is nonetheless worth noting the important correspondence between Guesde and his Guadeloupian alter ego Hégésippe Jean Légitimus, elected a general councillor there in 1896 and affiliated to the Parti Ouvrier. He informed Guesde, step by step, of the progress that socialism was making on the island. Légitimus would be the first black man to take his seat in the Palais-Bourbon, in 1898. He was subsequently nicknamed the 'black Jaurès'. It would nonetheless seem more judicious to refer to him—at least in a first period—as the 'black Guesde'!

Our MP for Roubaix thus still had a significant web of international correspondents. Yet there remained one great weakness which limited the impact of his multiple contacts: namely, his relative lack of interest for theoretical debates, in which he never participated. Among the French socialist leaders he certainly did not have the range of a figure like Jaurès; necessarily less familiar with certain disputes, he did not have the same depth of perspective as this philosophy *agrégé*, who directly knew the texts in German. He also paled by comparison to Vaillant, an old correspondent of Feuerbach who had made several study visits to Germany. Even among the Guesdists' own ranks, we would have to turn to Lafargue to find doctrinal treatises. These were often schematic, but far more developed than Guesde's own opuscules. He remained a 'purely' political figure from this point of view.

Unexpected Defeat

In the mid-1890s nothing seemed able to stop the electoral rise of the representatives of the proletariat. That, at least, is what Guesde and many of his friends seem to have believed. Drunk on success, socialists who had only fifteen years earlier still been a small groupuscule of a party now represented a real political current. They were convinced of their own irresistible advance: comparing himself to the republicans of the 1860s as they mounted their assault against the Second Empire, Guesde confided to *Le Matin*: 'the straight line of march took me to the Palais-Bourbon … there, I represent the future, the socialism which is rising and growing; there, I

represent the offensive. They, they are the past, death-agony.'[61] The density of the party's militant implantation in Le Nord had given him wings. In 1898, half of the POF's national membership were to be found in the Fédération du Nord alone.

But on closer inspection, did Guesde really want to be known as the outgoing MP for Le Nord? Behind the scenes, matters seemed less clear. The republican paper *Le Progrès du Nord* suggested that he hoped to be 'repatriated' to the Paris region:

> Jules Guesde, considering his defeat in Roubaix at the next parliamentary elections near-certain, is allegedly working to find a constituency in the Seine département where he has a greater chance.[62]

It was suggested that the Saint-Denis socialists were preparing the ground for him. The Guesdist paper *Le Réveil du Nord* immediately dismissed this rumour, which could only do harm to Guesde, who was already facing difficulties and whose local legitimacy was both fragile and recent. Many sources point in this direction: Guesde, it seems, had neglected his constituency, which he mechanically considered won for good. He continued giving talks in tours covering the whole of France and—regularly falling ill—he made little show of himself in Roubaix itself. It seems he headed there only around once a year, for May Day or to support a Parti Ouvrier candidate.[63] Indeed, the militants in Le Nord criticised him for not being a child of this region and for not living in the constituency itself.[64] 'A rootless man without connections',[65] Dominique Schneidre wrote in her memoir. As a consequence, 'Jules Guesde was but a ghost-like presence in Roubaix', at least in this period.[66] A police report indicated that 'the mayor of Roubaix has expressed his horror at the negligence by Guesde, who does not occupy himself with his constituency, which he seems to consider a fief that now belongs to him'.[67]

[61] *Le Matin*, 20 November 1893.

[62] AN F7/15965. Report from the Prefecture of Le Nord, 26 September 1897.

[63] Robert Pierreuse, *La vie ouvrière à Roubaix de 1890 à 1900*, Contemporary History Masters' Dissertation, Lille III, 1957.

[64] Memoirs of Madame Verecque, cited by Claude Willard, L*es guesdistes*, op. cit., p. 383.
65. Dominique Schneidre, *Fortune de mère*, Paris, Fayard, 2001, p. 124.

[65] Dominique Schneidre, op. cit., p. 124.

[66] Remi Lefebvre, op. cit., p. 304.

[67] ADN. Dossier Guesde 'élections Nord', 14 March 1898.

Guesde's task was all the more complicated because this time he faced only one other candidate, determined to fight to the last to hunt the 'collectivist' out of the Palais-Bourbon. The partisans of Motte—a local boss who employed thousands of workers, professing moderate republicanism and liberal convictions[68]—tore into the socialist, as they waged their campaign against 'Guesde misère'. A public debate ended in shouting and scuffles that continued throughout the speeches. On the way out of the meeting, there were altercations between Guesde's supporters and adversaries: there were clashing cries of 'Long live Guesde' and 'Down with Guesde', amidst a scrum which prompted brawling even in the neighbouring streets.

Motte managed to win the election, presenting himself as a son of this region and a 'beneficent employer', while also emphasising that Guesde was an outsider who had been 'parachuted' into the constituency. He made full use of the card of a *roubaisien* born in the town, son to a family which had set up the local industry and, through this, allowed for Roubaix's development. The boss thus won thanks to a kind of 'proletarian localism'. Historian Claude Willard sees this as the result of disappointed promises: the Roubaix poor could be proud of having a good representative in the Assembly, but their condition had not improved—and Guesde had, after all, promised socialism in the short-term. In this view, Guesde was a sense the victim of his own lyricism about the future society. Doubtless this factor could have worked against him.

But historian David Gordon proposes a finer analysis. The mechanistic Guesdist outlook imagined that the workers' gaining of consciousness would be an inexorable process, in which, thanks to their party, they were now capable of forming a working class ready for socialism. In reality, the aspirations of the workers of Roubaix were divided between the better future promised by the socialists and a liberal current influential far beyond the employers' circles alone—one that was solidly anchored, despite the breakthrough by Guesde and his allies.[69]

On the Left, the Radicals also had a certain audience: the socialists would struggle to represent a majority without them, and Guesde had benefited from their votes, by default, in his first election. Many small

[68] David Gordon, 'Liberalism and Socialism in the Nord: Eugene Motte and republican Politics in Roubaix, 1898–1912', *French History*, 3/1989, p. 332.

[69] ANF7/15965. Ville de Wattrelos. Cabinet du commissaire de police à la Direction de la Sûreté générale, 17 April 1898.

traders and middling professionals, successfully tempted to vote socialist in 1893, were probably frightened by Guesde's interventions in the Assembly, with his most extreme arguments gladly reproduced by local newspapers. For his part, Motte was careful to campaign in defence of small property-owners. Like elsewhere—depending on the conjuncture—the Radical electorate would decide to pitch the constituency either to the Left or to the Right. In this case, the fear of the 'redistributors' probably turned some people away from voting socialist.

A Current and Its Fragility

These weaknesses and the underestimation of the difficult balance of forces in Roubaix each related to a contradictory element of Guesde's current—relativising the dynamic glorified by the socialist propaganda of the time, which was often exaggeratedly triumphalist. Intellectually speaking, the Guesdists took up a position at the margins of the discussions within the international socialist movement. At a time when German social democracy was beginning its discussions on the mutations of capitalism, the Guesdists above all settled for reaffirming their rather summary version of Marxism. Moreover, as historians Michelle Perrot[70] and Antoine Prost[71] have emphasised, Guesdism remained above all a regional and localised reality, even if its early structuring process granted it a national or even international echo. Guesde's socialism did not have the power of a nationwide current, either in electoral terms or with regard to its militant base. It remained a sub-sensibility which had still not sunk sufficient roots—as Guesde's defeat at the end of his first term demonstrated. In the 1898 parliamentary elections, the Guesdists only gathered 3.6 per cent of the vote nationwide. They remained very weak in Paris, had relatively little presence in the South and were concentrated in a few bastions, above all Le Nord and, even more precisely, Lille and its environs. In these places an impressive citadel did nonetheless remain standing, even if this, too, was subject to electoral fluctuations. Here, the POF membership was heavily working-class (blue-collar workers accounted for almost half of its members) and the party controlled a good part of working-class social spaces.

[70] David Gordon, art. cit.

[71] See, for instance, the compte-rendu of Claude Willard's book in *Annales ESC*, 1967, pp. 701–710.

Lastly, division again bore its full effect here, affecting all those who identified with socialism. Separated into multiple currents, the socialists did not adopt any easily understandable strategy. Even among the Guesdists—whom their adversaries presented as dogged centralisers—the local realities were highly diverse. Depending on the particular moment, and the region, Guesde's partisans practiced all manner of alliances: in Bordeaux in 1896, there was even a list uniting the collectivists and the royalists, a line again justified by Lavigne, who had become accustomed to this type of adventure during the Boulangist crisis. Like some other Guesdists, he had gone so far as to support 'General Revanche' Boulanger in the 1880s. This nationalist was a threat to the stability of the Republic, and some Guesdists saw in this a possible route to revolution. Yet in 1889 the republicans managed to marginalise him.

In 1898, during the parliamentary election campaign, others instead showed their commitment to 'republican discipline'—that is, standing down in favour of the republicans: in Montluçon, the Guesdist Constans proclaimed that 'if from the economic point of view, we are socialists … we are above all republicans'.[72] Confusion reigned, across different contexts and contests. But we should not heap blame on the Guesdists: for the revenge coming from bosses and conservative forces also played a role in Guesde's defeat in 1898. Organised meticulously ever since 1893, this revenge campaign also defeated Jaurès in his constituency, notwithstanding the different context there—it put heavy pressure on the workers, including and most importantly threatening their jobs. This bore its effect, even if at the national level the number of socialist votes continued to grow.

Crossing the Desert?

Guesde was personally very affected by his defeat. All the more so given that there was a build-up of other bad news and personal tragedies and his own health remained precarious. After the lyrical illusion of 1892–1893, the much-heralded revolution would now have to wait. Nonetheless, we should be careful not to lay it to rest too quickly: for Guesde was not out of the game. Remaining in contact with many socialists, from local officials to international ones, in these years he imposed himself as a front-rank

[72] See Antoine Prost's conclusion in Bernard Ménager, Jean-François Sirinelli, and Jean Vavasseur-Desperriers (eds.), *Cent ans de socialisme septentrional, Actes du colloque de Lille, 3–4 décembre 1993*, Villeneuve-d'Ascq, Université de Lille III, 1995, p. 402.

figure even despite the defeat of 1898. Insulted, hated, or the object of a genuine cult among his partisans, Guesde had become a figure of national political life. While *Le Figaro* had mentioned Guesde's name only around a hundred times between 1887 and 1892, during his term as an MP the conservative daily tripled its number of references to him, as his resounding speeches in the Assembly obliged.

Guesde was, moreover, one of the incarnations of a wider process. For the French Republic now had to find a way to handle cohorts of socialists that were becoming more and more numerous, even despite their continuing dispersion. Indeed, rapidly integrated into the institutional game, the socialists soon lost their specificity and their original energy—notably the most revolutionary among them. While the neo-Blanquists and the Guesdists were previously united by a lasting distrust towards universal suffrage, for now, at least, they had watered down this stance. Just a few years previously, Guesde had bitterly combatted all gradualist arguments. Now, in the game of parliamentarism and legality, he effectively gave greater weight to these arguments, however much he denied doing so.

Yet nothing was yet fixed—and the disputes of the turn of the century would soon show this with some clamour. This was especially true during an affair that had already begun some time previously, but from 1898 took on a particular importance for the socialists: the Dreyfus Affair.

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CHAPTER 4

‘Finally, We Have Cut Ties’: The Intransigent (1898–1905)

A few months before the parliamentary elections, in January 1898 Émile Zola published his famous ‘J’accuse!’ in *l’Aurore*. The writer searingly cast doubt on the impartiality of the justice system in the case of Alfred Dreyfus, convicted in 1894 of having handed over documents to Germany.

At first, this affair left the socialists rather cold. Most of them—just like other politicians—had no doubt as to the captain’s guilt. But the precarious character of the evidence gradually opened up room for doubt: it became increasingly clear that Dreyfus had been targeted because he was Jewish. In this context, Zola’s appeal was a real thunderbolt in French political life: the affair would soon drive debate around all corners of the country, sparking violent clashes and brawls. It would also have a lasting impact on the Republic’s future.[1] Each political figure had to declare themselves a dreyfusard or an antidreyfusard and justify the choice they had made. But the dividing lines were sometimes far from obvious. Guesde’s experience itself provides a fine example of this, given the many ambiguities and the changing positions among he and his comrades. Indeed, the Dreyfus affair was a key episode in the history of the French socialists, who tore themselves apart over what stance to adopt. Their problems were redoubled the following year with the first socialist participation in government, which further aggravated the division in their ranks.

Guesde himself was entering a troubled period. Having just lost his post as an MP and faced with a series of personal dramas, he took the lead

[1] Vincent Duclert, *L’affaire Dreyfus*, Paris, La Découverte, 2005.

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J.-N. Ducange, *Jules Guesde*, Marx, Engels, and Marxisms,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-34610-2_4

of the oppositional front on the Left. From his perspective, the socialists could neither defend an army officer—whatever justification was invoked—nor participate in a 'bourgeois' government. This was a choice laden with consequences, and some have characterised it—not without good reason—as a 'fight he missed'.[2] Guesde's positions doubtless marked a turning point: this was, in a sense, the end of the heroic period. In a flattering biography in which Compère-Morel sang the praises of his teacher, he devoted more than 440 out of 500 pages to the years from Guesde's birth up till 1898—and only sixty to the years from 1899 to 1922! Guesde was not, however, retired and inactive in this period—far from it. For whoever might want to write a hagiography of the former MP for Le Nord, things certainly did get complicated in these years. But for the historian these are years of capital importance: indeed, to try and minimise them would prevent us from understanding the mark that Guesde left on the French socialist movement. So, it is worth distancing ourselves from any interpretation able only to see a figure in 'decline'. Certainly, the policy of abstention from the Dreyfus affair would 'mark, for the Guesdists, the end of their political hegemony over the socialist movement'.[3] But by no means did this imply their disappearance: indeed, without them there would have been no future for a united socialist party in France.

Choosing Intransigence

Let's look back a bit further. Before Zola penned 'J'accuse', already in the 16 May 1896 issue of *Le Figaro* he had published a piece 'Pour les Juifs' in which he vigorously condemned the atmosphere of antisemitism. A few years before that, back in 1892, Guesde was not himself found wanting on this terrain: he, too, had fought antisemitism virulently, attacking it in multiple articles. For instance, the 26 June 1892 issue of *Le Socialiste* referred to antisemitism as a 'deviation'; proudly reproducing an article from *La Question Sociale* (the POF's local weekly in Bordeaux) criticising antisemitism, Guesde insisted, with the caustic tone that had marked his writing ever since the 1870s:

[2] Gilles Candar, 'Jules Guesde, le combat manqué', *Mil-neuf-cent*, no. 11, 1993, pp. 50–55.

[3] Gilles Candar, *Jean Longuet. Un internationaliste à l'épreuve de l'histoire*, Rennes, PUR, 2007, p. 41.

> *Clericalism*, that's the enemy, proclaimed Gambetta to the applause of the bourgeoisie, happy to direct against the Church the rising tide of working-class grievance. The Jew, that's the enemy, say the sellers of more or less free word,[4] taking this out of the same—bourgeois—bag of malice. The point, here, is to save capitalist exploitation by distracting the workers with the so-called *youtres*, who have become scapegoats for the sins of—or thefts by—the Israel of bosses. What relief it would be for present-day society if, rather than continue the struggle between dispossessed and property-owners, for these latters' expropriation, it could instead be displaced and limited to the struggle between those with and without a foreskin.

Not long after this, on 8 July 1892 Guesde participated in a sharp debate with several notorious antisemites, notably Drumont, in which he energetically rebutted their ideas.[5] But Guesde's friend Charles Bonnier published articles with far more ambiguous positions, bordering on anti-semitism. An equivalence was sometimes drawn between capitalism, elites, the wealthy and the Jews, especially when it came to pointing out the role of rich families like the Rothschilds. This, even if such pieces were always tempered by the calls to order appearing in *Le Socialiste*, often written by Guesde or Lafargue. In the Guesdist regional press we can find arguments with a whiff of antisemitism.[6] But the national organ mostly chose to reproduce articles from the regional press which denounced it. Moreover, such arguments ought to be put in their proper context.[7] Despite everything, the prejudices of certain socialists—which are, without doubt, appalling in hindsight—cannot be confused with a totalising, systematic and hateful antisemitism. And it is worth noting that if on occasion the socialist press did allow in some antisemitic hues, this was nothing comparable to the daily outpouring of hatred in Édouard Drumont's *La Libre Parole*. Drumont was the author of one of the most widely circulated pamphlets of this era, *la France juive*, initially published at the author's own expense with Flammarion in 1886 and then republished constantly throughout our period.

[4] A reference to Drumont's *La libre parole*.

[5] Alexandre Zévaès, *Jules Guesde*, *1845–1922*, Paris, Librairie Marcel Rivière, 1929, pp. 109–110.

[6] Claude Willard, *Le Mouvement socialiste en France (1893–1905). Les guesdistes*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 1965, p. 411.

[7] Robert Stuart, *Marxism and National Identity. Socialism, Nationalism and National Socialism during the French Fin de Siècle*, Albany, State University of New York, 2006.

One report preserved in the Sûreté (investigative police bureau) archives deals with the thorny question of antisemitism in Guesde. However, it remained at the level of raising question marks. Noting that 'it seems that Jules Guesde … has serious grounds for hatred against certain Israelites in Le Nord', it spoke of supposed negotiations with Drumont, a claim based on rumours: 'It is even said, though I give you this information with some reservations, that Drumont will offer to pay his election expenses in any other constituency'.[8] Many other reports suppose bridges or closer relations between antisemites and Guesdists, but also emphasise major points of friction: for example, Guesde supposedly expressed his indignation when *La Libre parole* reproduced a distorted version of his arguments. Were there ambiguities? Certainly. But there was no organic link or clear political agreement with the antisemitic far-right. Thus, an attentive examination of the contemporary sources would belie any attempt to make out that Guesde was a consistent antisemite.

Moreover, at first Guesde was not against Zola's letter—quite the opposite. Indeed, 'J'accuse' received the keen endorsement of many socialists. While some doubted this 'bourgeois' writer's sincerity, Guesde forcefully insisted: 'Émile Zola's letter is the most revolutionary gesture of these times!' Guesde had got to know Zola, whom he had met on several occasions. Despite the great political distance between them, at first the two men had real appreciation for one another. Many accounts from this period emphasise that Guesde supported intervention in defence of Dreyfus, even more so than independent socialists like Millerand. Gabriel Deville, an old comrade in arms of Guesde's who had passed over to these latters' side, recognised as much in a letter to Wilhelm Liebknecht, writing 'when, aided by Millerand, I prevented the group from doing what was done afterward—namely, launching the socialist party into the personal campaign in favour of Dreyfus—it was Guesde who fought me most doggedly, and went further than Jaurès did in the same direction'.[9]

Yet Guesde did end up changing his position, and ultimately refused to join the campaign in defence of Dreyfus. Jean Jaurès headed in the opposite direction: in summer 1898 he wrote a piece for *Les Preuves*, in which he stood up for the captain. Notably, this tribune for Carmaux reacted against the POF manifesto which had been published in the 24 July 1898

[8] AN F7/15965. Sûreté générale report, 12 December 1899.

[9] IISG, Wilhelm Liebknecht papers (henceforth IISG W. L.). Letter from Gabriel Deville to Wilhelm Liebknecht, 2 July 1899.

issue of *Le Socialiste*. This latter text clearly expounded Guesde's own positions, indeed sharply rejecting any campaign in favour of Dreyfus:

> It is up to the politicking and literary bourgeoisie to divide over the culpability or innocence of a captain of the High Command or an infantry commander and tear themselves apart in the name of the *patrie*, law, justice and other such words, empty of meaning so long as capitalist society endures. The proletarians for their part have no interest in this battle, which is not their own. … In this fresh crisis which the ruling classes are going through, we do not have to be Esterhaziens or Dreyfusards, but remain the class party, knowing nothing other and fighting nothing other than the class struggle for the emancipation of labour and humanity.

How can we explain such an about-turn? Guesde's friend and loyal adviser Bonnier, of marked antisemitic prejudices, certainly played his role, here. Wilhelm Liebknecht's choice not to support Dreyfus's cause similarly influenced Guesde. Liebknecht—an old friend of Marx and Engels who had fought on the barricades in 1848—enjoyed immense authority, especially after Engels's death. He appeared as *the* great German revolutionary of the heroic period. As a sign of this prestige, the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* founded by Charles Péguy—an ardent dreyfusard—devoted a good part of its first issue to rebutting Liebknecht's arguments against Dreyfus!

Nonetheless, with this choice Guesde also isolated himself at the international level. Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg and Georgi Plekhanov had long considered him one of the preeminent representatives of Marxism in France, although they were probably each circumspect about his capacities as a theorist. But they instead backed Jaurès's turn. 'Only Liebknecht gave us his full endorsement', Bonnier mentions in his memoirs.[10] This was weighty support, but it was going against the stream.

How should we understand this choice? Beyond evaluations of the effect that this or that personality or current had on Guesde, it seems that 'the political aspect was decisive', argues the historian Gilles Candar.[11] 'Building socialism and nothing but socialism'—this formulation of Guesde's well-summarised his attitude during these years. To win elections and conquer positions was one thing. To defend the honour of a

[10] Gilles Candar (ed.), *Les souvenirs de Charles Bonnier. Un intellectuel socialiste européen à la Belle Époque*, Paris, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2001, p. 215.

[11] Gilles Candar, 'Jules Guesde'..., art. cit.

military official was something else. The professional army was the same one that had crushed the Paris Commune in 1871; and for Guesde and many comrades of his generation, this counted a great deal. The incipient dreyfusard campaign instead rallied republicans in a broad front that could not tolerate a 'purist' like Guesde. Moreover, there was a more 'internal' matter at stake, here, namely that of demarcating the Guesdists from other socialists. This was important in an era where the bases of unity—which seemed inevitable, in the long term at least—were being discussed. In his bid to win this battle, Guesde chose intransigence but also what he called 'independence'. There was no question of tailing independents like Jaurès, which would have risked dissolving a political identity that had been patiently constructed since 1879.

Threatened on the right by Jaurès and his ties with republican circles, Guesde also had to keep a grip on those to his left. Since the emergence of the CGT he was no longer the only leader of a national organisation which advocated sharp class independence from the state. Guesde never gave up on the idea that the unions would have to be subject to the party. But he understood that the space on the left wing of the workers' movement—the wing that remained critical of integration into the Republic—was now being occupied by the CGT. To join the united front of republicans and leave this space up to the syndicalists would not only have been incoherent, given the memories of 1871, but also risked the marginalisation or outright disappearance of Guesde's own current. Was Guesde also trying to take into account some measure of popular antisemitism and attract the readers of *La France juive* back to the right front—the class struggle? We cannot rule out this possibility in the case of some of the Guesdists, who were used to sealing unnatural alliances. But we might doubt this rather more in the case of Guesde himself, who had always persisted in a propaganda very hostile to Drumont.

It is difficult to know, then, if Guesde consciously calculated this about-turn—and reading the texts, his change of position between January and summer 1898 was, indeed, truly spectacular. On the basis of sources from the police prefecture and the *Sûreté générale*, the historian Leslie Derfler has tracked Guesde's evolution—or rather his return to a sort of intransigence—and attempted to interpret it. Derfler emphasises the importance of Guesde's 'political opportunism'[12] in this about-turn. Clearly, Guesde's

[12] Leslie Derfler, 'Reformism and Jules Guesde', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 12, 1967, pp. 66–80.

turn did, in part at least, owe to his loss of his seat in the parliamentary elections—a defeat he was long unwilling to accept. This setback also convinced part of his base that elections were not after all so useful, even as Guesde himself was changing his line, increasingly advocating parliamentary action and the peaceful revolution. The reports studied by Derfler also emphasise the great risks presented by the unity among socialists, which was liable to undermine Guesde's own positions in the party now that he was absent from the benches of the National Assembly. Nonetheless, such an understanding overeggs the element of calculation, even if this was doubtless part of the story.

Indeed, it seems possible to advance another hypothesis, itself linked to the relationship between Guesde and his allies and electoral politics. Enthused by the possibility of becoming the majority by legal means, many Guesdists had sincerely sought to 'play the electoral game'. Reading their texts, it was almost as if any electoral victory could be considered permanent! Everything seems to suggest that—beyond Guesde's personal case—the succession of defeats, both unthinkable and unforeseen, sparked a sudden backsliding. For want of any possibility of winning power, for the moment at least, the good old tactic of independence would at least make it possible to rally the troops, while waiting for better days.

Nonetheless—pointing to a profound crisis—Guesde's positions were far from unanimous even within his own current. Rather, his stance created a sense of malaise, dividing also his own allies, including front-rank figures. Indeed, Paul Lafargue begged Guesde to perform a further *volte-face* and return to his initial position. In multiple letters, notably a missive dated 27 September 1898, Lafargue called on him to abandon his present tactics. Revisiting this episode a year later in a 28 July 1899 letter to Liebknecht, Lafargue referred to 'Guesde and Vaillant's absurd and inconceivable conduct in the Dreyfus affair'.[13] For Marx's son-in-law, Guesde had allowed Jaurès to win new ground, thus marginalising his own current in a struggle of the highest importance.

There is no doubt as to Lafargue's insight, here: Guesde would, indeed, lose a lot of prestige in this affair. One example among many shows this incontrovertibly: namely, the changing alignment of the Guesdist freemasons. Sensitive to the humanist dimension of the dreyfusard struggle, they

[13] IISG W. L. Letter from Paul Lafargue to Wilhelm Liebknecht, 28 July 1899.

moved towards Jaurès's positions.[14] Despite their formal obligation to maintain a strict independence from the bourgeois world, many of Guesde's partisans were, indeed, simultaneously members of both the POF and a masonic lodge. As the historian Denis Lefebvre notes, a significant slippage took place at the moment of the Dreyfus affair, which rallied many republicans around a single cause. For them, Guesde's worker-separatism no longer made sense, faced with the anti-republican threat which the affair had brought out into the open.

'Ministerialism' and the Failed Attempts at Unity

A few months later, another problem came along. Yet this time it restored the unity in Guesdist ranks—while deepening the divide among socialists. Amidst the context of political crisis triggered by the Dreyfus affair, in July 1899 a government of 'republican defence' took form under the leadership of the moderate republican Waldeck-Rousseau. Alexandre Millerand, an independent parliamentary socialist, became minister of Trade and Industry in a broad-coalition government which brought together various republican sensibilities. Over and above the differences between them, all of the forces involved were attached to this regime, faced with the reactionary threat which the antidreyfusard dynamic represented. Millerand remained a minister up till 1902, attempting to drive a wave of reforms in a bid to give credibility to socialist action in government.

However, Millerand's choice was far from unanimously supported. Indeed, it triggered a debate around so-called 'ministerialism', as the socialists divided over the legitimacy of governmental participation. For Guesde, there could be no question of supporting any ministerialist approach, which risked abandoning socialism's identity. He had known Millerand for some years. Side-by-side at the banquet of Saint-Mandé in 1896, they had saluted the glories of municipal socialism. But hostility between the two men had emerged even before the ministerialism affair: already in 1897, the Guesdists had surreptitiously taken control of *La Petite République* newspaper, and the antagonism between Millerand and Guesde within the parliamentary group was ever more blatant. Moreover, in 1898, Millerand's re-election to parliament had stood in stark contrast to the bitter defeat suffered by Guesde.

[14] Denis Lefebvre, *Socialisme et franc-maçonnerie, Le tournant du siècle (1880–1920),* Paris, Bruno Leprince Éditeur, 2000.

Unlike in the Dreyfus affair, this time the front of refusal extended far wider. Guesde was no longer isolated on the international scene, since Kautsky like Luxemburg gave him their backing. In France itself, Guesde found a weighty ally in Vaillant and his Blanquist current, together with whom he directed his fire at Millerand. For the old Communard Vaillant, it was unthinkable to support the Waldeck-Rousseau government. After all, sitting alongside Millerand there was a certain Galliffet—the general who had been in charge of repressing the Paris Commune in 1871. In July 1899 the POF together with several other socialist groups—including Vaillant's Parti socialiste révolutionnaire—published a manifesto 'to working-class and socialist France', in which they reasserted the fundamentals:

> The socialist party, a class party, cannot—on pain of suicide—be or become a ministerial party. It must not share power with the bourgeoisie, in whose hands the state cannot but be an instrument of conservation and social oppression. Its mission is to tear [power] from it, in order to make it the instrument of liberation and the social revolution.[15]

A few weeks later, the Épernay Congress of the POF in August 1899 condemned Millerand in similar terms. However, a minority managed to add in a reference to the 'exceptional circumstances' in which socialists could enter government, thus displaying a less intransigent sensibility. Jaurès, for his part, supported Millerand's action, in the name of the defence of the Republic. In the Assembly, the socialist group split between those who supported the new government and the rest.

In continuity with the Dreyfus affair, what thus motivated Guesde's action was a strict 'class' positioning. For him, class independence was indispensable, and to give up on it would be to lose the soul of socialism. The former MP for Roubaix exchanged multiple letters in this regard with his old friend Liebknecht, who now had only a few months left to live. He told the German revolutionary of his rejection of 'ministerialism' with great clarity. On 16 July 1899 Guesde confessed to Liebknecht his pride in having broken with the pro-government socialists: 'Finally the split is complete, finally we have cut ties'. On 11 November 1899 he reiterated:

[15] 'À la France ouvrière et socialiste', *Le Socialiste*, 16 July 1899.

'We will be able, even at the cost of a break, to save what you call our independence and what I myself call socialism in France'.[16]

This time, Guesde could count on the backing of Lafargue, who was determined to break with Jaurès. In a 29 January 1900 letter addressed to Guesde, he returned to the opportunity that had been missed in the Dreyfus affair, even in terms of promoting an intransigent struggle against the 'intriguers': 'We will defeat Jaurès and the clique of intriguers. … We had the stupidity not to intervene in the Dreyfus affair to draw out the consequences useful for socialism; Jaurès cornered a popularity that was bound to cost us dear.'[17] For his part, in a letter to Vollmar (a German social-democrat who belonged to the party's moderate wing) Guesde insisted that if it had not been for Galliffet's presence, participation in the government would have been more widely accepted, including by Vaillant.[18]

All the same, we should not overlook a certain generational effect, here: the bad memories left by the experience of Louis Blanc—the first socialist in government—in 1848 and even more so the Paris Commune in 1871 played a role in Guesde's thinking, leaving him extremely distrustful of 'moderate republicans', ready to open fire on the people. In his reaction to the Dreyfus affair, a rejection of socialist unity perhaps won out over all other considerations. Such was the argument made by his old friend Gabriel Deville. Of course, no one could outwardly declare himself against unity; but according to Deville, 'Guesde and Lafargue did not dare and will never dare to clash frontally with such a movement; but they will do all they can to prevent its success, using no matter what pretext'.[19] In this view, Guesde's intransigence was thus skilfully calculated.

Personal factors may have also played a role in Guesde's radicalisation. As we have already noted, 1898 was a difficult year for him; 1899 and 1900 were quite simply tragic. Gravely ill, he left an incomplete letter to his son dated 19 February 1899 in which he foresaw his own death: 'My dear Mario, last night I was struck by a blackout, a bad omen. If this really is to be the end, I am counting on you.'[20] His friend and comrade Aline

[16] IISG W. L. Letters from Jules Guesde to Wilhelm Liebknecht, 16 July and 11 November 1899.

[17] IISG J. G. Letter from Paul Lafargue to Jules Guesde, 29 January 1900.

[18] IISG, Georg von Vollmar papers, letter from Jean Jaurès to Georg von Vollmar, 3 September 1902.

[19] IISG W. L. Letter from Gabriel Deville to Wilhelm Liebknecht, 2 July 1899.

[20] IISG J. G. Letter from Jules Guesde to his son Mario, 19 February 1899.

Valette died of tuberculosis shortly afterwards, on 21 March 1899. A few months later he opened up to Liebknecht about the 'exhaustion of his nervous system'.[21] He was suffering from diabetes and prostate problems. His wife was also suffering: in July 1900 she was struck by a generalised cancer. Then came the death of one of his confidants—his old comrade in struggle, Wilhelm Liebknecht, who passed away at the end of August 1900. Beyond his personal pain, Guesde here also lost a strategically important ally, the only major figure to have backed him in his 'class' resistance against the defence of Captain Dreyfus. He now appeared much more isolated in terms of his links with German social democracy. Even if we do not want to psychologise Guesde's political choices too far, it is impossible to think that these events could have had no influence on his conduct, in a period of particularly heavy tensions among the socialists.

Nonetheless, we should be careful to avoid that teleology which would make Jaurès the big winner of all these clashes. Though Guesde had dented his image, he had not become ultra-minoritarian and for the moment at least he had not been sidelined. He maintained a strong standing among those who stood for the socialist idea in France. Indeed, his unembellished fight for independence did appeal to part of the militant base. Revisiting a figure whom he had known well, in the 1930s Charles Rappoport—who drew closer to Guesde in precisely the moment that the socialists were tearing themselves apart over 'ministerialism'—spoke in his memoirs of the articles Guesde had written in that era:

> But despite the uniformity of the subject, Guesde's articles are read with interest still today. A burning fire of struggle runs through them and the temperament of a real fighter for a great idea penetrates them and preserves their lasting freshness.[22]

The rivalry intensified. In late 1899 a general congress of socialist organisations met in the Salle Japy with a view to accelerating the drive towards unity. But differences soon came out into the open. While the POF's hegemony was widely challenged, the party worked to seal closer ties with all those who rejected Millerand's actions. Vaillant and Guesde took the same line, as did Jean Allemane. By 818 votes to 634, the

[21] IISG W. L. Letter from Jules Guesde to Wilhelm Liebknecht, 20 June 1899.

[22] Charles Rappoport, *Une vie révolutionnaire: 1883–1940, les mémoires de Charles Rappoport*, Paris, Éditions de la MSH, 1991, p. 186.

congress passed a resolution insisting that 'the class struggle does not allow a socialist to enter a bourgeois government'. A second resolution nonetheless softened this formal prohibition somewhat. A fresh congress was called for the following year in Paris, in order to effect unity among socialists. But no one had any illusions that this could happen in the short term, given the divisions over such essential points.

The press again played an essential role in the political realignments now taking place. For some, Rappoport tells us, 'this was the most lamentable era of socialist history in France'.[23] The Guesdists did not shrink from any means with which they could launch attacks on their adversaries. *La Petite République* had for a time been controlled by the Guesdists, but now, under Jean Jaurès's leadership, it was very clearly committed to republican defence. Could this become the organ of all socialists, allowing them to express their diverse opinions? It seems that such a project was indeed envisaged, but it collapsed under the weight of divisions. According to Guesde—relating the negotiations between the POF and Jaurès—such an agreement could never have taken place. In a 25 May 1900 letter to Liebknecht, Guesde argued that 'divorce is inevitable, before too long'. He spoke of the possibility of cooperating within one same paper, but added 'Jaurès has given a negative response, remarking that though he has a daily, we have a powerful organisation, and since we do not give him part of our organisation he does not have to give us any share in his paper'.[24] Sharing the family jewels was not on the agenda.

For want of being able to take back control over *La Petite République*, the Guesdists sought by all means to found a daily of their own, in order to avoid abandoning the field to the Jaurèsians. They made contact with the owner of *Le Matin*, Alfred Edwards. He was a rich but troubled figure, the son of a doctor to Sultan Abdul Hamid of Turkey. Edwards founded a daily called *Le Petit Sou*, which he placed under the control of Guesde and his allies. The paper began circulation on 2 September 1900. By no means was Edwards a Marxist convinced by Guesdist rhetoric: he above all vowed his deep hatred for his brother-in-law Waldeck-Rousseau, whose political rise he was unable to tolerate. In *Le Petit Sou*, Jaurès gave him regular dressing-downs. With his peerless talent as a pamphleteer, Lafargue condemned 'the emperor of phrases' Jaurès. While this daily had a low circulation, it nonetheless expressed the Guesdists' will to confront the

[23] Ibid., p. 197.
[24] IISG W. L. Letter from Jules Guesde to Wilhelm Liebknecht, 25 May 1900.

'ministerialists'. The tensions among socialists had reached their height. Revisiting these years of 'heroic socialism', Maxence Roldes—a partner of Jaurès, Guesde and Briand—remembered a Guesdist song directed entirely against Jaurès, which well illustrates the atmosphere of the time:

> Jaurès! Jaurès! Your phrase is Homeric, Your word a light, Your pen a hammer, But in all that the working class sees nothing, alas, But you spinning a yarn.[25]

An International Affair

The Millerand was far from just a problem specific to France. With his actions the new Minister of Trade and Industry had posed a question to international socialism as a whole: could one participate in a government of unity together with non-socialists, and on what conditions? This was one of the main issues addressed by the congress of the Socialist International which met in Paris in September 1900. As the site of the congress demanded, the French delegates participated *en masse* in the highly agitated debates. But one voice counted above all at this global (mainly European) assembly of socialists: that of the powerful German Social-Democratic Party.

At the same time, the SPD was itself traversed by a major crisis, whose debates intermingled with the differences among the French socialists. Eduard Bernstein, executor of Engels's will, had published a series of articles gathered in a book, *The Preconditions of Socialism*.[26] Here, he broke with what he considered the 'catastrophism' of Marxist readings, instead advocating a socialism-through-stages that was supposed to be more adequate to the new developments in the capitalist system—which, contrary to the more perfunctory forecasts, had not in fact collapsed. 'Revisionism' was born—a concept destined to a big future in the history of the Left.

Immediately, Karl Kautsky and the left wing of the party around Rosa Luxemburg gave their response; Luxemburg was, indeed, among the most vehement critics of revisionism, insisting with conviction on the need for a revolutionary rupture with the capitalist system. For her there could be no doubt: Millerand in France was but the translation into practice of Bernstein's theories. On closer inspection, matters proved more complex.

[25] Maxence Roldes, '*Jean Jaurès*', *La presse*, 8 January 1946.
[26] Eduard Bernstein, *Les présupposés du socialisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1974 (1899).

But there remained a key question mark, running through most of the debates of the congress: was it still necessary to make the revolution? Guesde made no contribution to this debate from the theoretical point of view. Less of a theorist than ever, he above all took a stance with respect to the French political debate and its concrete consequences. As Emmanuel Jousse has shown, the debate on revisionism did indeed transfer from Germany to France.[27] But in real terms it concerned Guesde rather little.

At the International's Paris Congress, the right man for this theoretical job was, instead, Karl Kautsky. Armed with his powerful historical legitimacy—like Bernstein, he had been close to Engels—the man nicknamed 'the Pope of Marxism' had no intention of allowing Bernstein's theses to make the slightest headway. Yet, nor did he want to give a blank cheque to Guesde. Without doubt, the Left presented the Guesdists as the natural allies of German social democracy. Luxemburg's explicit support clearly showed as much: in the SPD's theoretical review she went so far as to write that Guesde and his friends had saved 'not only the honour of socialism, but something more—socialism itself'.[28] Karl Kautsky, a defender of parliamentarism—Jaurès tellingly prefaced the French edition of his book on this subject that same year, 1900—backed the defence of Dreyfus and was distrustful of Marxists' indifferent attitude to theoretical and economic problems. He chose to put forward a compromise motion for the congress to vote on. This has entered history as the 'Kaoutchouc' (India rubber) resolution. To summarise the spirit of this text: socialists could not participate in a bourgeois government—except on certain conditions, which were not clearly defined. The motion 'le[ft] it up to the socialist party's judgement to decide on this question in a determinate situation'. Millerand and thus Jaurès were not, therefore, totally repudiated.

The text thus left room for governmental participation. The proof: Guesde, along with his comrades on the Left like the Italian Ferri, wanted another text to be adopted, radically opposed to 'all participation in bourgeois governments, against which socialists must remain in the state of irreducible opposition'. The clear consequence of this interplay of motions was that Guesde was no longer the privileged interlocutor of the German social-democrats. The SPD majority instead increasingly played a

[27] Emmanuel Jousse, *Réviser le marxisme? d'Édouard Bernstein à Albert Thomas, 1894–1914*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2007.

[28] Rosa Luxemburg, 'La crise socialiste en France' in Rosa Luxemburg, 'Le socialisme en France', *Œuvres complètes* Vol. III, Marseilles, Agone, 2013, p. 163.

'balancing-act' role, in the perspective of the expected future unity. This episode thus weakened Guesde, albeit without destroying his influence entirely.

Indeed, 1900 saw the complex intersection of several different paths. In the polemic over Bernstein and revisionism, Jaurès was careful not to distance himself too much from Kautsky—and in turn, Kautsky was careful not to align himself too much with Guesde! Each of them was walking on eggshells in order to avoid missing the historic opportunity for unity, the 'Gotha' of the French socialists which they were still awaiting. For good reason: for after the International's Paris Congress, a general congress of French socialists was held in the Salle Wagram. Incidents broke out right from the outset, as Guesde's allies challenged the congress credentials of some of the other participants. Each side repeatedly accused the other of aggression—including even physical attacks. Despite everything, a fresh text was voted through, proposing that unity be realised within six months. All that was left to do was to put this into practice—in a context that was tenser than ever before.

Jaurès, Guesde: Two Methods

But on what basis could socialists coexist in one same party? Everyone knew that questions of militant and electoral implantation would be decisive at the coming congresses, both in France and internationally—but so, too, questions of doctrine. The theoretical debate between Guesde and Jaurès thus picked up a certain energy, indeed at the height of the 'ministerialist' episode.

> The greatest pleasure which you can do us is not to applaud us but to listen to us. It is a great honour for the socialist party to hold debates like this evening's and I believe I can say that this is the only party that has such faith in the power of its principles, that it can hold a political debate among its own militants in this way.[29]

These were the words with which Jean Jaurès began his most famous debate with Guesde—the dispute over the 'two methods'. This debate, concerning their differing methods for properly pulling France onto the

[29] Jean Jaurès, Jules Guesde, *Discours des deux méthodes*, Paris, Le Passager clandestin, 2014 (1900), p. 21.

path of socialism, has been frequently republished up to our own time. The initiative owed to the mayor of Lille, Gustave Delory, who was close to Guesde. But how are we to make sense of such a debate even taking place, when unity seemed more compromised than ever before? Already in October, Jaurès—hoping to subvert the POF's 'sect mindset'—had issued an appeal in *La Petite République* for socialists to gather into various autonomous federations:

> An autonomous Federation of Le Nord and the Pas de Calais has already constituted itself. In the very region where the Parti Ouvrier has its fortresses, this Federation will soon draw toward itself all those groups who want to live the full socialist life. Thus the groupings of the Parti Ouvrier Français, gradually liberated from the sinister fetters of the sect mindset, will enter into socialist unity, with their solid organisational qualities but also an expanded and renewed spirit.[30]

Therein lay the whole Jaurèsian wager. Betting at all cost on closer ties—even at the moment when differences seemed stronger than ever—the Carmaux tribune hoped that in time openness would win out over sectarianism. One week after this article appeared, in this same organ Jaurès related a proposal from the mayor of Lille: a debate with Guesde. Jaurès accepted the challenge and the debate ultimately took place on 26 November. *La Petite République* reproduced the interventions over the following days, even before they were published as a pamphlet.

Thousands of militants came to the Lille Hippodrome to hear, applaud or protest the speeches by these two emblematic figures of a French socialism, which it seemed that nothing could reconcile. Subsequently canonised by the socialist movement, this hard-fought debate allows us to fully understand their respective 'enunciation strategies'—a dimension emphasised and indeed studied by the linguist Pierre Muller.[31] The Northern audience was largely on Guesde's side: Jaurès was here seeking to convince distrustful layers of militants of his own positions regarding Dreyfus and Millerand. Like for Guesde, the class struggle guided Jaurès's actions: 'I imagine that on this point there can be no serious contradiction between us'.[32] But 'in the Dreyfus affair … it will be impossible for you to resolve

[30] *La Petite République*, 2 October 1900.

[31] Pierre Muller, 'Jaurès et Guesde, deux interlocuteurs socialistes en 1900', *Mots*, 1/1989, pp. 53–65.

[32] Jean Jaurès, Jules Guesde, op. cit., p. 30.

this question by limiting yourselves to invoking the general formula of the class struggle'. Jaurès's argumentative strategy above all mobilised examples borrowed from German social democracy, taking care not to browbeat the militant public with examples that lay too close to home. Jaurès explained how, from its very first years, this model Marxist Party had needed to accept compromises, starting with Liebknecht in 1869, when he was forced to declare allegiance to God in order to penetrate the fortress that was the Reichstag. Conversely, Jaurès was silent on the thorny question of 'revisionism' in Germany, even having published long articles on this subject only a few months before. Did he fear that he would fall into Guesde's trap? Or that he would not be understood by a militant audience little-interested in 'German' theoretical quarrels, considered foreign to French realities?

Moreover, in elaborating his arguments, Jaurès made only sporadic reference to his adversary. This was much unlike the approach taken by Guesde, who constantly denounced Jaurès's own reasoning. It was as if Jaurès was addressing socialists as a whole, or even speaking to an audience beyond their ranks, while Guesde seemed above all concerned to harden his own current and its internal coherence. Jaurès rhetorically embraced Guesde and his allies with the formula 'us socialists', whereas he was rebutted with a typically Guesdist expression, 'we, the Parti Ouvrier Français'. Before its own militant audience, Guesde's party insisted on its own invariance, employing a formula that would die hard: 'You will remain yourselves, class against class'. Indeed, as Pierre Muller explains in his analysis, 'Guesde's discourse thus took on a sharply more polemical aspect than Jaurès's'.[33] The orator from the Fédération du Nord was, indeed, on the defensive: tellingly, he had no real practical example from the German side to put up against Jaurès's. The Carmaux orator also had more to say: he expounded his arguments faced with a Guesde who was above all repeating a largely well-known doctrine.

A New Organisation: The Parti Socialiste de France

Guesde wanted the new socialist party to be founded on his own preferred bases. And having passed from failure to failure, the unity projects finally resulted in a split. The third congress of socialist organisations, held in Lyons in May 1901, once again revealed the chasm that was opening up

[33] Pierre Muller, 'Jaurès et Guesde …', art. cit., p. 58.

between the partisans and opponents of Millerand's actions. But this time, the split came to fruition. Guesde and Vaillant decided to launch their own party, the Parti Socialiste de France (PSDF), officially founded in Ivry on 3 November 1901. For them, this meant that unity had, in fact, been realised: the others who took opposed positions had, by this fact alone, set themselves outside of socialism itself. The new party's charter emphasised that the new organisation 'must not in any circumstance, through participation in central government … through alliances with bourgeois parties, provide any of the means that could prolong domination over the working class'.[34] But facing them stood a Parti Socialiste Français, founded in Tours in March 1902, that was just as well structured, and brought together the independent socialists including Jean Jaurès.

The new PSDF did not enjoy any surge of dynamism, but instead suffered a series of electoral defeats. Above all, the balance of forces with the PSF was much to its disadvantage: at the 1902 legislative elections it collected under 400,000 votes, while its brother-enemy's candidates took over 600,000. Jaurès's PSF won 36 seats whereas Guesde's party won just 13. Only in terms of their number of militants did the partisans of Vaillant and Guesde have the advantage—the PSDF had around 17,000 members, as against 10,000 for the PSF. Beyond sheer numbers, there were also highly symbolic expressions of their differing fortunes, not least Guesde's emblematic defeat at the ballot box in 1902. He failed to win back his Roubaix seat, unlike his brother-enemy Jaurès, who was again victorious in Carmaux. Had Guesde hesitated about standing, for fear of seeing his authority in the young party threatened should he lose? Probably; but ultimately, he decided to throw himself into the battle. He signed his professions of faith as 'your representative in 1893–1898, forever your defender', insisting on his intention to represent one class above all others in the Chamber: 'You are invited to champion not an MP but a class, your own'.[35] Guesde did not skimp on resources and held numerous electoral rallies. But this was all in vain. This was, indeed, a tough period for his friends—the Roubaix city hall also fell in that same year's municipal elections, as it was captured by the partisans of the local MP, Motte. The 'Mecca' of Guesdism thus entered into crisis. Citing his disagreement with

[34] Cited by Georges Lefranc, *Le mouvement socialiste sous la Troisième République*, Paris, Payot, 1977, p. 112.

[35] ADN. Fédération PS papers. 198 J 122. 'Profession de foi de Jules Guesde', 20 April 1902.

Guesde's maximalism, former Mayor Carette quit the sinking ship; he founded a purely local party, the reformist Parti Ouvrier Socialiste Roubaisien (POSR), allowing him to seal an open alliance with the radical republicans.[36]

The drop in the number of provincial party papers provides another important indicator of the PSDF's weakness in this period. The new energies expected from alliance with Vaillant were also slow in coming. Again, the party's alliances varied greatly: in some locations, such as Lille, the PSDF allied with republicans, whereas elsewhere it had no problem campaigning shoulder to shoulder with nationalists against its brother-enemies. For instance, the Guesdists had no hesitation doing this against Gustave Rouanet in Paris. The politics of 'the worse, the better' was of the season, here—though such a policy was not systematically adopted nationwide.

Nonetheless, when it came to their parliamentary representation—numerically weighed in the PSF's favour—the two socialist parties could sometimes vote as a bloc. Loyalty to Millerand was very much relative: he often voted alone in parliament together with the Radicals, against the PSDF of course, but sometimes also against the PSF. The two organisations voted together on the policy of *laïcité*: state secularism. Conversely, Jaurès was himself little-followed and relatively isolated within the PSF when he defended the first bills on workers' pensions, which most socialists considered insufficient and unworthy. In short, the Guesdists and Vaillantists frequently managed to pick off PSF MPs to vote with them, while the opposite was much less often the case. Apart from the measures regarding *laïcité*, the PSDF clearly failed in terms of building solidarity with the Radicals and only occasionally managed to pull a few PSF MPs onto its own line.[37]

In the PSDF leadership, Guesde made no original contribution. Nor did he have the advantage when it came to the written word. For instance, he did not manage to put up anything equivalent to the vast editorial enterprise that was the *Histoire socialiste de la France contemporaine* directed by Jaurès.[38] When this latter asked him to write the part on the heroic era of the National Convention (1792–1794), Guesde refused to

[36] David Gordon, 'Liberalism and Socialism in the Nord: Eugene Motte and republican Politics in Roubaix, 1898–1912', *French History*, 3/1989, p. 331.

[37] Jean-Jacques Fiechter, *Le socialisme français de l'affaire Dreyfus à la Grande Guerre*, Geneva, Droz, 1965.

[38] Jean Jaurès, *Histoire socialiste de la Révolution française*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 2014 (1901–1904).

participate. Political differences largely explained this point of no return, but perhaps, so, too, the fear of not being at the same level as Jaurès's own writing. What is more, while Guesde had always underlined the ambivalences of the 'bourgeois revolution', he had never really expounded and theorised this idea. Guesdism also found itself in difficulty faced with Jaurès's talented exposition, across hundreds of pages, of the indissoluble link between Republic and socialism, between the bourgeois revolution of the eighteenth century and the continued tradition of working-class struggles across the nineteenth century. The PSDF's main leader did no more than bring out a brief text in 1883—a few pages jointly written together with Lafargue—which reaffirmed contemporary socialism's necessary rupture with the bourgeois republican inheritance. He also issued a translation of a short book by Karl Kautsky, whose authority among socialists internationally was now at its height. Titled *The Class Struggles in France in 1789*, it provided a critical, Marxist reading of the Jacobin tradition. But again, Guesde's own lack of writing was patent: though he was meant to produce a preface to Kautsky's book, he ultimately gave up on this task, for unknown reasons.[39]

At the moment of the first great crisis in Marxism, we would struggle to find any effort of Guesde's to provide a theoretical response, grounded in a reading of Marx's texts. Doubtless, we could note, for example, the first publication of the *Letter on the Gotha Programme*—an acerbic text written by Marx in 1875, critiquing the shortcomings of the SPD's programme, known after 1920 as the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.[40] Tellingly, it was one of the publishers of Guesde's own texts, the 'Librairie G. Jacques', that took on the work of publishing this text by Marx. But its reception was very modest and the Guesdist press preferred to refer the reader to a choice of Guesde's texts rather than Marx's own writings. Apart from the expected invective against all those who supported socialists joining the government, there was no innovation, here. Indeed, the man who had rubbed shoulders with Marx and co-authored a political programme with him showed no interest in the disputes over the legacy of Marx's works. Rather, militants were encouraged to reread the old *Catéchisme socialiste* or, indeed, to consult the impassioned speeches

[39] See Jean Jaurès, Karl Kautsky, *Le socialisme et la Révolution française*, Paris, Demopolis, 2010 (a choice of texts from 1889–1908).

[40] See the history of this book in the introduction to Karl Marx, *Critique du programme de Gotha*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 2008.

Guesde had made back when he was an MP: these texts were collected and published in 1899 under the title *Quatre ans de lutte de classes à la chambre*. The doctrinal debate instead took place elsewhere, in circles close to reviews like *Le mouvement socialiste* (whose driving force was Hubert Lagardelle) or in pieces by Georges Sorel, close to the CGT. These latter all considered the Guesdists and their theorists to be merely sterile; Lafargue, for example, was one of the preferred targets of Sorelian prose. Indeed, if Lafargue did more than Guesde to attack 'revisionist' theories, he offered no particularly original contribution, here, too, collapsing ideological disputes into immediate political problems without really discussing the points Sorel had put forward.

Nonetheless, Guesde, Guesdism and what it represented maintained a real power of attraction. The aforementioned case of Charles Rappoport seems, if not easily generalised, at least symptomatic in this regard. Distrustful of vulgar Marxism and a fervent admirer of Jaurès, upon the creation of the PSDF he nonetheless drew close to Guesde. Explaining this choice in his memoirs, he counterposed 'the idealists, Jaurès in the lead … who had become "practical", partisans of a socialism of "small gains," as Georges Clemenceau put it, and the materialists [who] fiercely defended the socialist *ideal*'. Paradoxically, for Rappoport, the idealism to which Jaurès so strongly laid claim in fact lay on Guesde's side of the divide: 'Thus I had to acknowledge that the true idealists in action were to be found on the Marxist side, whereas Jaurèsist idealism was the very basis of opportunism over "participation," the ally of the governing bourgeoisie'.[41] That said, for Rappoport there was no shadow of a doubt that Jaurès's texts and analyses were superior. Referring to Jaurès, he explained how 'the profound, high idealism of his nature and his socialism attracted me to him. Philosophically, I was anti-Marxist. … But I was, at the same time revolutionary. … I could not swallow Jaurès's attacks against the revolutionary tactic.'[42] Thus in this period there were men who, while circumspect of the Guesdists' more dogmatic aspects, nonetheless joined them out of attachment to the revolutionary tradition.

Paul Faure's decision was also significant in this regard. From a well-off background, he joined the Parti Ouvrier Français in Dordogne in 1901, at the height of the divisions among socialists and shortly before the creation

[41] Charles Rappoport, op. cit., p. 233.
[42] Charles Rappoport, op. cit., pp. 205–6.

of the PSDF.[43] He met Guesde in 1903; from this moment, according to Faure, 'our relations of teacher and disciple were established'.[44] They spent several weeks together at Faure's home, as this latter became the party's secretary for the Dordogne *département*. Elected mayor of the small town of Grignols on 15 May 1904, at twenty-four years of age the new convert became the youngest mayor in France, in a *département* in which no other mayor belonged to this same political camp. Exhausted by the day-to-day management of this office, he resigned two years later, though he remained an important political figure for the party. An ardent Guesdist who attended both French and international congresses, Faure was regularly in the front-rank in denouncing Jaurès, a 'chatterbox' who proclaimed 'puerile banalities that even a rhetoric student playing politics in the holidays would have shrunk from'.[45] He hammered home this message in multiple talks. For instance, during a presentation of 'revolutionary socialism' to the Freethinkers, he insisted that 'Jaurès and Millerand are hucksters—there are no true friends of the people except in the Party of Jules Guesde'.[46]

Guesde always brought supporters with him. He continued to embody a class-centric socialism—and as bearer of the revolutionary tradition, it was also distrustful towards excessive integration into the Republic. This line was, doubtless, much too intransigent to win the hearts and minds of all socialists. It nonetheless retained a certain power of attraction and could to some extent even surprise with its boldness.

At the same time, Guesde's own friendships remained both solid and influential: he could count on many close friends in party ranks, to the point that it is hard to imagine that he could have had any friendship with individuals politically distant from him. No matter what the activity concerned, he was always accompanied by some party loyalist. He went fishing with Marcel Cachin, who also hosted him for holidays in the Arcachon Basin, and sometimes went to stay with Faure. When he wrote to his daughter and, later, his granddaughter, he would use a party postcard. Symbols counted a lot for this Guesdist tradition, indeed helping to galvanise the group. For instance, the PSDF issued postcards of Guesde and

[43] Bernard Dougnac, *Paul Faure, biographie (1878–1960),* PhD thesis at Bordeaux III, October 2006, especially pp. 40–80.

[44] Louis Lévy, *Comment ils sont devenus* socialistes, Paris, Éditions du Populaire, 1931, p. 13.

[45] Paul Faure, 'L'épave', *Le Socialiste de la Haute-Vienne*, 3 April 1904.

[46] *La Croix du Périgord*, 31 July 1904, cited in Bernard Dougnac, op. cit., p. 47.

in Le Nord it even produced tie-pins with likenesses of Delory. Looking to another Guesdist fortress, we can cite the 23 February 1902 *Le socialiste de l'Allier*, which reproduced the lyrics of a song in tribute to Guesde:

> We want to openly declare once and for all that we are proud to be treated as Guesdists. … Guesde is a man who honours not only socialism but all humanity.

A cult of personality? We should be careful not to project onto Belle Époque France some of the later phenomena which resulted from the butchery of the Great War of 1914–1918 and which were rather more linked to the emergence of authoritarian parties. What we can at least do is diagnose a fervent admiration for Guesde among his partisans, who saw him as the apostle of the social revolution. Here, attachment to the insurrectionary tradition mixed with a sensibility blended with workerism and anti-intellectualism, imbued with powerful distrust towards politicians who had come from the elite and the Republic's *grandes écoles*.

Amsterdam: A Pyrrhic Victory?

Did Guesde still imagine he could crush the PSF and become the main leader of the only party recognised by the International—and, most importantly, by the SPD in Germany? Certainly, it is in this vein that we should understand his warm approval for the resolution passed at the Dresden Congress in 1903. At this congress, the SPD forcefully rebuked—verbally, at least—Bernstein's theses aiming at a revision of Marxism. As the International's next congress loomed, the Guesdists, allied to the Vaillantists, hoped to exert as much pressure as possible in this same direction.

In this vein, at the PSDF's Reims Congress in November 1903 the party adopted extensive sections of the Dresden resolution in condemnation of 'revisionism'. They stepped up their attacks on the PSF and its members, though again the situation varied depending on the region. As a symbol of this ongoing clash, the different socialists were vehemently opposed as to the proper link between party and press. Indeed, there had already been a great deal of lust for control over *La Petite République*. Seeking to allow a wide debate on the future of socialism and its different paths, in April 1904 Jaurès together with other socialist intellectuals launched a new daily paper, *l'Humanité*. This newspaper was 'socialist'

but not attached to a party. Guesde and his friends, however, inveighed against the new daily. In the 24 April 1904 issue of *Le Socialiste*, Bracke railed against Jaurès's sense of 'openness', instead insisting on the decisive need for a party organ:

> This name [*l'Humanité*] well suits an organ in which, even in the very first issue, the great tribune bangs the drum saying everyone can come in. … His socialism is so broad that no one is left out: the Great Turk and the Republic of Venice both have their way in.

It was in this very tense context that the International's Amsterdam Congress opened, three months after the launch of Jaurès's new daily. The PSF and the PSDF were both invited. Guesde wanted to do away with any sense of ambiguity and prove that he was the authentic representative of socialism in France. The biggest delegation came from the PSDF (forty-one delegates) including Guesde, Vaillant, Bracke, Faure and Cachin. As for the PSF, it had thirty-one delegates, including Jaurès, Jean Longuet and Pierre Renaudel. Finally, the allies of Jean Allemane, representing a distinct current, had seven delegates. Guesde sat in the congress's key commission on tactical matters, alongside Jaurès, Kautsky, Bebel, Luxemburg, Vandervelde, Adler, Iglesias, MacDonald, Plekhanov and De Leon. At first, Guesde succeeded in getting the better of Jaurès: in the middle of one of Jaurès's interventions, Guesde interrupted him and issued a violent, impassioned charge-sheet against 'prefecture socialism', greeted with thunderous applause. Tradition holds that Guesde here denounced the 'ex-comrade' Jaurès—though this expression did not in fact appear in the congress report. Backed by his friends from the left wing of the SPD, Guesde continually foregrounded a vigorous internationalism, emphasising that the bourgeois Republic could not mark the onset of contemporary socialism:

> You make the Republic the preface or first chapter of socialism. If that were true for France it would be true for all the other countries. And that is why we pose this question before the proletariat of all countries.[47]

At a congress with a densely packed agenda, Guesde sought to discredit his adversaries by the simplest of means. He demanded that the

[47] Speech by Jules Guesde reproduced in *L'Humanité*, 18 August 1904.

International adopt the 1903 Dresden motion, so warmly approved by the PSDF itself just before Amsterdam. Together with the SPD's traditional supporters in central-eastern Europe, victory was almost assured. Indeed, the text was passed by a very large majority.

But Jaurès did not admit defeat in this debate—and instead opted to mount a frontal attack on the SPD itself. He accused the German party of lacking a revolutionary tradition—unlike in the French case—and emphasised the SPD's effective impotence in Germany as compared to the French, who could now weigh on national political life thanks to their support for the Republic. Jaurès thus proposed an amendment to soften the severe judgement issued by the Dresden text. Defended by the Austrian Adler and the Belgian Vandervelde, this amendment only narrowly missed out on being adopted by the congress. The balance between the different positions was, therefore, much more fragile than what Guesde had thought and what the delegates' applause had suggested. As the 'India rubber' resolution in 1900 had already shown, the time in which Guesde and his allies were the International's natural representatives in France now lay in the past.

Kautsky, Bebel and the other SPD leaders—well-informed of the balance of forces in France—had no intention of closing the door to other socialists, regardless of their own historical links and ideological affinities with the Guesdists. For evidence of this, we need only look at the conclusion of one intervention by Vandervelde, conscious of what was at stake in the association between the two most visible French leaders: 'Marx said, "Workers of all countries, unite". Well, today, we say, "Workers of each nation, unite".' He then called on Jaurès and Guesde to shake hands 'so that the work created by Engels and Marx may be triumphantly accomplished by proletarian unity, in service of our common ideal'.[48]

For Guesde, this was a rather cruel comparison—for he was now put on an equal footing with his adversary. If the Amsterdam Congress approved the Dresden motion and thus refused to endorse revisionism, it ultimately passed a motion—on the initiative of Kautsky and Bebel in particular—which called for socialists in all countries to unite. Indeed, it was 'indispensable that in all countries, faced with the bourgeois parties, there is just one socialist party, just as there is but one proletariat'. Formally speaking, this text did not particularly refer to France. Divisions

[48] Cited by Patricia van der Esch, *La Deuxième Internationale 1889–1923*, Paris, Marcel Rivière, 1957, p. 47.

also existed elsewhere, for instance in Russia. But in light of the debates and the actors involved in this congress, it was, indeed, Jaurès and Guesde who were particularly being thought of, here. With this text, the International no longer left the choice up to the French, or to Guesde himself. The PSDF was not the only interlocutor and it would have to fuse with the PSF.

History has sometimes drawn from this the conclusion that the unification of French socialism—to be realised the following year—was possible only under the influence of the International, indeed strongly inspired by the SPD. Without doubt, this latter did play a role in driving events. But to consider this the only cause of the dynamic which followed would grant a wholly excessive importance to the congress texts themselves. Indeed, already before the congress, the rapid advance of France's socialist currents since the 1893 parliamentary elections risked near-imminent ruin because of the incessant divisions and polemics. In this sense, Amsterdam sounded the alarm, one last time, faced with the risk of a generalised collapse. But the ambition to get rid of potentially fatal divisions also existed among French militants themselves.

Sometimes we read accounts holding that Jaurès gave up a great deal of ground to Guesde and Vaillant by committing himself in these circumstances. It would, then, seem that a socialist party prone to revolutionary rhetoric had been disarmed even before it entered government. Yet this is a reading made with the benefit of hindsight, which overlooks the balance of forces at the time. The resolution calling on 'all militants and all fractions or organisations that identify with socialism … to work with all their forces for the realisation of socialist unity on the basis of the principles established by the international congresses' needs deciphering—that is, by looking beyond the fraternal appeal to unity alone. Indeed, here the International sent a double-edged message to the two French parties. When it referred to the 'international congresses' it did, certainly, condemn the most openly declared 'revisionism'. Above all, it suggested to Guesde that the glory days of the POF were definitively over. But other texts showed a relative flexibility in doctrinal terms. As the historian Georges Lefranc has aptly concluded, with reference to the real meaning of the Amsterdam Congress: 'If Guesde had believed he could achieve unity through the entry of all socialists into the PSDF, he was following himself: he could achieve this now no better than he could have done in

the POF twenty years previously'.[49] Guesde's intransigence had got a hearing—but it had much less persuasive power than it seemed.

Jaurès had not been tricked: on the contrary, he had scored decisive points over Guesde. Since 1893 the MP for Carmaux had learned how to deal with Marxism in a Guesdist sauce, going so far as to borrow part of its rhetoric. Certainly, it only half-persuaded him, but Jaurès did not neglect Guesdism; instead, he weighed up its full importance in the French socialist movement and its lineage from the revolutionary tradition. In parallel to this, Jaurès also traced his own path of alliances with the Radicals, in the context of the Dreyfus affair. Despite divisions and difficulties, his young party had overtaken the PSDF. In short, he had successfully made headway for himself.

A similar assessment regarding Guesde would be much more contradictory, not least given that he had long believed himself able to unite the greater part of the different socialist factions under his own leadership. Now he had to beat a retreat, under the friendly yet firm constraints imposed by the SPD. After Amsterdam, Guesde longer practiced the policy of 'the worse, the better'. Effectively paying no heed to the more radical of his friends who wanted to break with Jaurès and his allies at all costs, he instead accepted unity. Did he think he could create a lasting majority within the new party? Crafty and tenacious, Guesde could not be buried too soon, not least given that a wing of the PSF had sometimes proven close to his own positions. Guesde moreover knew very well that he was still the key figure in France's largest socialist federation.

Guesde the Opportunist?

Before we get to the historic moment of the foundation of the Parti Socialiste, what remains to be understood is how come so many back-and-forths could have taken place in just a few years. Having professed his support for violent revolution and then victory at the ballot box above all else, Guesde seems to have slammed into reverse gear in 1898. As we have understood, his defeat in the parliamentary elections, followed by the Dreyfus and Millerand affairs, swung Guesde back towards an intransigence which may have seemed to be heading for extinction just a few months earlier. But what conclusion can be drawn from this? A multitude of factors explain Guesde's individual choices, in part at least. But they

[49] Georges Lefranc, op. cit., p. 120.

cannot explain how the path of such a structured socialist current was so meandering. Was this a faction—a 'sect', Jaurès sometimes said—ready to do anything to impose itself, even if this meant changing its line as circumstances demanded? Certainly, there was an element of this in Guesdism. But the accusation of opportunism does little to understand a deeper tendency at work here. Rather, in Guesdism we can see the specific historical expression of a permanent tension in socialism. Indeed, socialism was divided between two sensibilities, inherited from history, which each surfaced in turn depending on the historical conjuncture. At some points it was the heritage of the revolutionary rebellions of 1789 and 1871 that prevailed, whereas at other points socialism distanced itself from this in favour of a more gradualist, reforming approach. This structural tension was never resolved. It was thus a tension that coloured militants' activity, the social struggles of the time and socialist vocabulary—and so, too, figures like Guesde, who were more ambivalent than they seemed.



CHAPTER 5

‘I Have Remained an Insurgent’: Guesde in the United Party (1905–1914)

‘The socialist party is one and indivisible, like the Republic of 1793.’[1] Such were Guesde’s words in a parliamentary debate on 15 June 1896. Yet there was still a long march ahead in terms of overcoming the divisions among socialists. After the Amsterdam Congress, it finally seemed possible that the old dream of unity could be realised. All that was left for Guesde and his partisans was to fight to ensure that the unification of French socialism took place on their own preferred bases. The entanglements they had been caught up in at recent international congresses showed that their prestige had, without doubt, taken a knock. But they did not admit defeat.

After the ‘class against class’ tactic came room for unity. At the final congress of the Parti Socialiste de France, held in Saint-Étienne in October 1904, Guesde unambiguously extended a hand to yesterday’s adversaries (if not without certain ulterior motives): ‘Now the past is all forgotten, a new page is being turned. … Let us forget the errors of those who abandoned the class terrain for a moment—to them we hold out a hand of brotherhood.’[2]

A unification commission was set up in November 1904. Clearly, Jaurès’s PSF was here largely aligning itself with Guesde’s PSDF and its more Marxist-leaning formulations. On 30 December 1904 the commission adopted a joint draft resolution. The Parti Socialiste was defined as a

[1] Jules Guesde, *Quatre ans de lutte de classe à la Chambre: 1893–1898*, Paris, G. Jacques, 1901, Vol. II, p. 2.

[2] Speech to the Saint-Étienne Congress, reproduced in *Le Socialiste*, 2–9 October 1904.

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J.-N. Ducange, *Jules Guesde*, Marx, Engels, and Marxisms,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-34610-2_5

'class party … which while pursuing the realisation of the immediate reforms demanded by the working class is not a party of reform, but a party of class struggle and revolution'. Its elected officials would come from the party's own central leadership—as the Guesdists had demanded—even if some form of de facto autonomy could be tolerated. In exchange for these formulations, which were difficult for more moderate elements to swallow, the PSF secured open discussion on questions of doctrine and method, as well as federal forms of organisation. Moreover, only the content of papers directly attached to the party like *Le Socialiste* could be subject to central control: Jaurès's *l'Humanité* would thus remain independent rather than subjected to the party itself. *L'Huma* maintained its line in favour of openness, giving space to all—Guesdists included. Bracke, who had excoriated the launch of an organ considered much too broad and confusionist, represented the Guesdist sensibility on its board, which he joined in 1906. There was resistance within the ranks of both parties—and some people were, inevitably, left disappointed. Yet despite this, the unity process, both sustained by strong aspirations among French militants and encouraged by the clear instructions from the International, now seemed like a one-way street.

In a congress held at Paris's Salle du Globe from 23 to 25 April 1905, the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière-Parti Socialiste was founded. Socialist unity was finally achieved, thirty years after the formation of the German Social-Democratic Party. But did Guesde, who had once hoped that the PSDF would be the only true socialist party, not find himself 'drowned out' in this new structure? We should not forget that without the Fédération du Nord there would have been no Parti Socialiste in 1905. Indeed, the Lille 'fédé'—which in 1905 lay slightly behind the Seine Federation (where the Guesdists remained marginal) in terms of membership numbers—again became the biggest federation in 1906, a position which it would maintain until 1914. Le Nord alone represented around one-sixth of the party nationwide: in January 1914, it counted 12,400 members, as against 72,765 across France. Indeed, if the Seine Federation was hot on its heels in terms of absolute numbers, the Lille 'fédé' organised much more of the local population: it had 6.5 members per 1000 inhabitants, the densest implantation of socialists anywhere in France, as against 2.8 per 1000 in the Seine.[3] This regional rootedness—a

[3] Alexandre Zévaès, *Histoire du parti socialiste de 1904 à 1923*, Paris, Librairie Marcel Rivière, 1912, pp. 8–9.

lasting fortress of socialism—allowed Guesde to continue to occupy a central position in the overall organisation.

Did this mean that Guesde's partisans dominated the new party? It all depends on how the historian goes about evaluating this. There were texts passed at congresses, announcements published in propaganda-sheets—and then, everyday practice. One good illustration of this question—a nagging problem, if one decisive for the local implantation of socialism—was the party's relationship with the radical republicans. Jaurès had long advocated alliances with these latter, whereas Guesde had generally rejected this, at least at the national level. At the party's Second Congress held in Châlons-sur-Saône in October 1905, Marcel Cachin presented a motion which called for as many socialist candidacies as possible in the parliamentary elections slated for 1906. In the second round, the party's local federations would have to act 'in the best interests of the proletariat'; a phrase which thus left them a certain margin for manoeuvre. But for the SFIO any risk of a return to 'ministerialism' and alliances with the republicans had to be ruled out. Thus, formally speaking at least, the party had not accepted 'republican discipline'. In the French context, this term referred to the practice in the second round of parliamentary elections, where socialists would stand down in favour of radical republicans (and vice versa) in order to block the right-wing (conservative or nationalist) candidate. Often such a discipline was, however, applied in practice. The whole ambiguity of Guesde's supposed domination over the young SFIO lay precisely in this fact. The Guesdists had preserved their own ideological fundamentals and officially continued to keep the Radicals at arms' length. Yet in practice their orientation largely corresponded to that of other tendencies, with the effect that the socialists and progressive republicans stood down in each others' favour in run-off contests. Yet this decision to stand down was always defended in the name of 'class interest'—and not the 'republican discipline' as embraced by a figure like Jean Jaurès.

Back to the Assembly

Here, it is worth examining the way in which Guesde approached the alliance question within his own constituency. Despite his reputation as a doctrinaire, he often showed greater flexibility in practice, especially during election campaigns. At the 1906 parliamentary elections he finally had his revenge, becoming an MP again. He just edged out Motte, winning by 50.96 to 49.04 per cent. He would never again lose his seat in the National

Assembly and continued to be re-elected up to his death in 1922. How can we explain this reversal of the socialists' fortunes, even after the loss of Roubaix city hall in the 1902 municipal elections?

Without doubt, Guesde was helped out, here, by the fact that the socialists had finally united at the national level. The impact of the first Russian revolution—a development foregrounded by Guesde's campaign itself—ought not to be neglected, either. Indeed, the repercussions of these events left their mark on the politics of 1905–1906, awakening hopes among Europe's socialists of a Russian Republic that would overthrow Tsarism. But the political conjuncture did not alone explain everything. Guesde's own deftness also played its role, here. His campaign began with a debate on 'Christianity and Socialism' at the Roubaix hippodrome, alongside the 'Sillon' movement's Marc Sangnier. Embodying the left wing of Catholicism, Sangnier and his Sillon movement were attentive to the social question and thus partly in agreement with the political solutions proposed by the SFIO. This dialogue between socialists and Christians allowed Guesde to expand his own base. In a region that was still very heavily imbued with Catholicism, these closer relations were hardly incidental. In this sense, Guesde had every interest in adopting the theses of his German friend August Bebel, to the effect 'religion is a private affair'. The resolution that emanated from the PSDF's September 1902 Issoudun Congress again applied here:

> Intellectual emancipation cannot precede but can only follow economic emancipation … consequently, the only serious anti-clericalism under the bourgeois regime is anticapitalism.[4]

A convinced atheist, Guesde published multiple texts against religion; but he continued to nurture doubts as to the specific merits of the anti-clerical struggle. His son Leo, who became a Catholic and baptised his daughter, subsequently offered an interesting family account on Guesde's feelings with regard to religion:

> My father always preserved these sentiments and these ideas regarding religion. My father was always anti-religious, but he above all blamed the clergy, for they pursued a policy inimical to the liberation of the working class. He always left his children free to belong to any religion. His desire for and

[4] Reproduced in *Le Socialiste*, 28 September 1902.

> principle of freedom determined this attitude on his part. Moreover, you know that he had a religious sister. I should also tell you that his son Mario had himself baptised some time before his death. Nonetheless, he did not baptise us, leaving us free to choose for ourselves when we were older.[5]

Another decisive factor in the electoral arithmetic was the fact that many Radical votes here flowed back to the socialist candidate. Indeed, in the context of the struggles that followed the 1905 law on *laïcité*, such voters abhorred the pro-clerical Motte.[6] As in the case of his first election win in 1893, from the first round Guesde benefitted from the support of the Radicals, despite the fact that—officially at least—he kept his distance from them.

Guesde's success also owed to the intensive campaign waged by his supporters, contrasting with previous contests in which the socialists had been divided. Guesde threw himself into the campaign, holding multiple public meetings and large rallies. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Guesde seemed to have drawn the lessons of his absenteeism during his first spell as an MP. As the political scientist Rémi Lefebvre emphasises, Guesde 'could find the way back to the Chamber of Deputies only at the cost of adapting himself to the logics of the territory itself'.[7] So, out with the MP who claimed to be only a party delegate and the embodiment of the entire working class. Now Guesde presented himself more modestly—but also more effectively—as the defender of Roubaix's workers, indeed at a time when the boss Motte was setting up factories in Russia. The socialists' propaganda thus underlined the fact that Motte spent a lot more time living in his castle in Belgium than he did in the working-class city of Roubaix. While the socialists' rhetoric maintained a pronounced emphasis on the class struggle—as was typical of historical Guesdism—it was now much more rooted in the local territory. Despite the many setbacks and reversals between 1898 and 1906, the socialists' patient work of building their militant forces—an effort the POF had begun already in the 1880s,

[5] Letter from Léo Guesde ato Joseph Genuzio, 12 November 1959, cited in Joseph Genuzio, *Jules Guesde et Émile Zola, ou Le socialisme dans l'œuvre d'Émile Zola*, Bari, Levante, 1964, p. 42.

[6] David Gordon, 'Liberalism and Socialism in the Nord: Eugene Motte and republican Politics in Roubaix, 1898–1912', *French History*, 3/1989, p. 317.

[7] Rémi Lefebvre, 'Le socialisme pris au jeu du territoire. L'ancrage de Jules Guesde à Roubaix' in Bernard Dolez and Michel Hastings (eds.), *Le parachutage politique*, Paris, L'Harmattan (Logiques politiques), 2003, p. 211.

based on a dense web of unions, cooperatives and associative structures—finally paid off. This part of northern France was irreducibly socialist, and Guesde's friends largely dominated it.

Guesde himself lived in the capital, notably at 56 Boulevard de Colmar, where he now had new furniture delivered for the first time: his was, nonetheless, a rather modest *embourgeoisement*! His material situation seemed to have stabilised, though it remained precarious; according to one family account, here the Guesde were passing 'from destitution to poverty'.[8] Having learned from his past failures, Guesde now regularly returned to Roubaix to chair public debates. For example, though he did attend the first parliamentary session in Paris, the following week he immediately headed back to his fief in order to chair a debate between Merrheim—a Roubaix CGT representative, hostile to the subordination of union to party[9]—and Henri Lefebvre, an SFIO member and secretary of the textile workers' union. He would work constantly to consolidate this bedrock, and the inhabitants of Roubaix would now get to see their MP more regularly.

Convergences and Differences

But there was another side to this coin. Now that Guesde was solidly implanted in his region, he perhaps did not notice, or did not want to see, certain political and economic developments which were becoming evident elsewhere—ones which would soon contribute to his marginalisation. For if in Roubaix the likes of Merrheim could be robustly challenged by the Guesdists, elsewhere the path of independence largely prevailed among the trade unionists of the CGT. The famous 'Amiens Charter' of 1906 sanctified this mutual independence—though it remained very much relative in many regions, where one could be a member of both the CGT and the SFIO without risking any scandal.

Guesde, for his part, insisted that the CGT could only have a purely defensive, which is to say, reformist role. Indeed, even strikes aroused a certain suspicion in Guesde: in a 28 May 1905 piece for *Le Travailleur*, he like the CGT defended the principle of the eight-hour day, yet he cast doubt on the effectiveness of strikes themselves: 'The eight hours will be

[8] Dominique Schneidre, *Fortune de mère*, Paris, Fayard, 2001, p. 71.

[9] Archives Municipales de Roubaix. Ville de Roubaix-Commissariat central, 21 October 1906.

the effect of a legislative reform, of a law—the strike will never succeed. There is not enough money in the strike coffers and the capitalists' power is too strong.' As Madeleine Rebérioux has noted in reference to French socialists like Bonnier and Guesde, influenced by the German model, 'These were all men of social democracy, for whom no sheet of blotting paper could be slipped between socialism and syndicalism without the risk of betrayal'.[10] While Jaurès did increasingly take on board arguments concerning the possibility of a general strike—a means of action which he considered useful in case of war—the Guesdists did not want to hear any such talk. Indeed, they hit back even harder: at the SFIO's Lyon Congress in 1912 Ghesquière and Compère-Morel sharply criticised the CGT's actions, going so far as to say, 'We've had enough of the method of sabotage, of the revolutionary general strike'.[11]

This opposition earned Guesde tributes which he would probably have done better without. For instance, the conservative paper *Le Temps* frequently saluted Guesde's anti-strike arguments. The 24 May 1907 *La voix du peuple* carried an article from *Le Temps* emphasising that 'the strike itself, the simple strike does nothing to enthuse Mr. Jules Guesde, who infinitely prefers peaceful propaganda and the legal conquest of public power through the ballot box. … The bourgeois owe no gratitude to Mr Jules Guesde. But we have the right to congratulate him for his legalist attitude.'

The time when Guesde had been considered a public enemy now lay in the past. Moreover, the police surveillance became much looser and more sporadic. Clearly, faced with the creation of the SFIO and Guesde's growing integration into the institutional game, the Interior Ministry no longer feared his revolutionary proclivities. Whereas at the beginning of the 1880s many of his meetings had been under police observation, with sometimes extensive transcriptions of what he had to say, by this point police surveillance had largely turned its attentions towards the trade-unionists of the CGT.

There was enduring hostility between Guesde and these latter. Indeed, Guesde's unabashed insistence on the subordination of union to party

[10] Madeleine Rebérioux's preface to Gilles Candar (ed.), *Les souvenirs de Charles Bonnier. Un intellectuel socialiste européen à la Belle Époque*, Paris, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2001, pp. 11–12.

[11] *Compte-rendu sténographique du congrès de Lyon*, Paris, Conseil national du Parti socialiste SFIO, 1912, p. 311.

offended many trade-union militants. In return, the Guesdists were continually the favoured target of many CGT members, who regularly denounced the MP for Roubaix in *L'Action syndicale*. Strongly anti-clerical, they delighted in pointing out apparent similarities between the Guesdist hierarchy and the Catholic Church. The 'red pontifex' Guesde was, it seemed, at the head of a 'system he conceived on the model of the faithful building their Church'.[12] This same vocabulary was again employed in 1911: 'The Pope has spoken and the encyclical of the Social Question has fallen from his sacred lips'.[13] Was this a way of stigmatising a Guesde too soft on the Catholic Church?

But here, again, when we look over the different levels of organisation, we are forced to acknowledge realities which were, to say the least, contradictory. The red 'pope' was, after all, not so closely followed by all the faithful—notably on the religious question itself.

In the Aube *département*, where Guesde's allies were the near-hegemonic socialist force, the fertile ground of Freethinking was decisive in allowing the party to sink roots. In 1906, anti-clerical rhetoric was at the heart of the *aubois* Guesdist current—for example, that June they went so far as to organise a 'Fête of anti-religious and socialist propaganda' for the inauguration of the 'Union Antireligeuse' group based in Troyes. Here 'the freethinking outlook was thus mobilised on an ongoing basis, testifying to its identitarian character'.[14]

For his part, Lafargue—still distant from Guesde on this point, and much more critical of religion—had just given a talk on 'Sciences and religion' in Troyes. Belonging to the Freethinkers did not rule out also being affiliated to the Guesdist current; among the Freethinkers we also find partisans of Guesde's like Paul Faure. In June 1905, Faure insisted 'I'm not at all interested in the question of separation. Anti-clericalism was specially set up in order to evade the social question.'[15] But we ought not look for any overly coherent positions, in this regard. Indeed, elsewhere we can find Guesde allies making surprising arguments in favour of free schools, as against uniform republican education, on the grounds that free

[12] *Action syndicale*, 4 August 1907.

[13] *Temps nouveaux*, 5 August 1911, cited by Marc Angenot, *Rhétorique de l'antisocialisme. Essai d'histoire discursive*, Laval, Presses de l'Université Laval (Quebec), 2005, p. 104.

[14] Stéphane Pirouelle, '*L'Aube rouge' (1876–1914): une racine libre-penseuse au guesdisme*, Recherches et études, Revue annuelle de l'IRELP, 1/2013, p. 99.

[15] *Combat périgourdin*, 18 June 1905, cited by Pierre Pommarède in *La Séparation de l'Église et de l'État en Périgord*, Périgueux, Fanlac, 1976, p. 202.

schooling would allow the founding of socialist schools that did not depend politically or financially on the bourgeois state.[16] Here—no matter what the militants of the CGT thought about it!—the Guesdists had much in common with some anarchist theorists. Beyond the friendly exchanges between different forces, it is possible that the old libertarian hinterland of certain Guesdists had not disappeared entirely. Other episodes would further illustrate as much.

What about parliamentary action? Here, too, a closer inquiry forces us to see certain dividing lines in more relative terms. A study of the parliamentary group's votes over the first years after unification—and these votes were, indeed, decisive, given the major role elected representatives played in party life—shows that the 'class party' Guesde so wished for did, all in all, keep its distance from the 'bourgeois parties'. Up till 1911, with rare exceptions the now-united socialists did not challenge the idea that they should not enter into agreements with the bourgeois-Radical majority. In 1906, just months after the party's creation, there was some hesitation over Clemenceau, as a prime minister backed by a left-wing majority in the Assembly. But with the series of strikes and the anti-working-class repression inflicted by 'France's top cop', the socialists took up an enduring oppositional stance. Apart from that, from 1906 to 1910 Guesde did not use obstructive tactics, but instead voted together with the parliamentary group on most issues. He backed income taxes and proportional representation while taking a hostile stand against the death penalty. Conversely, faithful to the memory of the battles which he had fought at the turn of the century, he abstained from paying homage to the partisans of Dreyfus. Also worth noting is the fact that differences of sensibility could result in unexpected areas of convergence. Thus, Guesde and Jaurès could often find themselves on the same side of the debate, even if their fundamental approaches diverged considerably. A de facto pact on religious questions came into effect after the 1905 passing of the law on the separation of churches and state. Jaurès presented himself as consistent in upholding a non-aggressive version of *laïcité*, where other Radicals wanted to go further. Meanwhile—as we saw in the case of the 1906 election campaign—Guesde considered the anti-clerical fight against the Church pointless, merely diverting the workers from the main struggle.

[16] Jacques Girault, *Le guesdisme dans l'unité socialiste (1905–1914)*, DES de l'Université de Paris 1, 1964, p. 121.

One further question divided the socialists following the debates over *laïcité,* namely, the thorny problem of ties with Freemasonry. This was an old question, but it was posed particularly sharply at two SFIO congresses, at Limoges in 1906 and then at Lyons in 1912. It is worth recalling, here, that at one time many Guesdist militants had also been Freemasons, before most of them abandoned Guesde during the Dreyfus affair.[17] The Guesdists had not, however, shifted their doctrine on this point. Already on 4 September 1886, *Le Socialiste* had bluntly insisted: 'The Masonic Federation is an organisation of the rich, for the poor are excluded by the high rates each member must pay'. Beyond the high cost of entry, Freemasonry also melded together the different social classes: something inconceivable for Guesdists who had fought hard for the SFIO to be a 'class party' above all else. Nonetheless, there were major socialist figures—firstly Paul Brousse and then, in our period, militants of some stature like Marcel Sembat. This question was also important politically. As the historian of the Parti Radical Serge Berstein has shown, up till 1912 'all the presidents of [the Radicals'] executive committee except Caillaux … belonged to Freemasonry. … The same was true of most of the key leaders of the party, indeed decisively so up till the First World War.'[18] Guesdists fought against this dual loyalty, just as the demands of class independence required. They tabled a motion at the Limoges Congress that sought to ban any socialist being a member of the Freemasons. The socialist federation of Le Nord was at the spearhead of this battle and similarly damned membership of the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, itself condemned as an enemy of the class struggle. Bracke sharply made this point in the 24 September 1906 edition of *l'Humanité*:

> One cannot deny that the Party sometimes finds itself faced with and opposed by not only the Freemasons of this or that region but all sorts of associations whose political character jumps to one's attention. I will cite the case of the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, for by its very name it proposes itself as a boulevard of the bourgeois Republic.

This argument carried real weight, and the bid to get the congress to ban SFIO members from also being members of masonic lodges only narrowly

[17] Denis Lefebvre, 'Socialisme et franc-maçonnerie' in Charles Porset (ed.), *Mélanges offerts à Daniel Ligou*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 1998, pp. 251–292.

[18] Serge Berstein, *Histoire du parti radical*, Paris, FNSP, 1980, Vol. 1, p. 47.

failed. Nor was this matter settled in following years, as this question remained the subject of conflict. The Guesdists went back on the offensive in 1912, in a context in which the closening of ties between Radicals and socialists gathered pace. On the eve of the 1912 congress, they hammered home their hostility to Freemasonry in the pages of their new weekly organ, *Le socialisme*. Foreshadowing the tough battle due to be had out at the coming congress, Charles Bonnier did not beat around the bush. For him, to be a Freemason was to unite 'socialists who protest against the massacres of workers and against the obstacles put up to the exercise of the right to strike, etc., with men who seek and have always sought to restrain and abolish this right, who persecute, who imprison, who shoot socialists, trade unionists and strikers'.[19] Another argument which recurred periodically in Guesdist writings was the question of how militants devoted their time: one ought not, after all, disperse one's forces. Jean Labas, who won back the Roubaix mayor's office in 1912, repeatedly underlined this consideration: 'the militant who wants to fulfil his duty, who knows that his party needs his time … never has too much time to give to propaganda and organisation'.[20] This fresh offensive ultimately ended in defeat: in 1912, even more so in 1906, the socialists allowed each militant the freedom to belong to any 'organisation of a moral or philosophical order'. The Guesdist position was defeated by 1505 votes to 927, most of these latter from Le Nord: meanwhile, a more radical motion took around a hundred votes. This was a clear, if not a crushing victory: the Guesdist current remained influential in the party. But its positions did, indeed, now seem to be in the minority. The new axis that was taking shape upset the old alliances that had existed before 1905: on most subjects Édouard Vaillant, who had once been close to Guesde, now aligned himself with Jean Jaurès.

Decline and Sclerosis

The debate on Freemasonry was symptomatic in this regard. Marc Angenot emphasises how after 1905, while 'Guesde got a hearing, only a small number was convinced by him'.[21] Guesde did, doubtless, embody

[19] *Le socialisme*, 30 September 1911.

[20] Cited by Denis Lefebvre, *Socialisme et franc-maçonnerie, Le tournant du siècle (1880–1920)*, Paris, Bruno Leprince Éditeur, 2000, p. 283.

[21] Marc Angenot, *Le marxisme dans les grands récits. Essai d'analyse du discours*, Paris-Laval, L'Harmattan-Presses de l'Université Laval (Quebec), 2005, p. 21.

part of the new party's identity, but he was gradually losing ground. In 1910 the reformist socialist Eugène Fournière could well worry about the persistent presence of a class-struggle vocabulary in the SFIO—something he considered incompatible with democracy. As Fournière put it, 'The orthodox Marxists are imposing their formulas, at least, on the Socialist Party'.[22] Yet in reality, these formulas were ever less applied in practice.

One key moment was the Toulouse Congress in October 1908. Guesde was unable to attend, having once again been struck by illness. On 4 February he headed off to Algeria for a spell of rest.[23] It was Bracke who fought on his behalf. Jaurès, however, won the day, with a synthesis motion which, though incorporating Guesdist vocabulary, defined a path between reform and revolution which took its distance from the more radical declarations of 1905. History has often remembered this as the 'Jaurèsian synthesis', a political line which would, in overall terms, dominate the SFIO up till the outbreak of war. Let's read an extract from the resolution passed at the Toulouse Congress:

> The Parti Socialiste, party of the working class and the social revolution, pursues the conquest of political power for the emancipation of the proletarians through the destruction of the capitalist regime and the abolition of classes. … Precisely because it is a party of revolution, precisely because it is not stopped in its incessant demands by what it sees as the outmoded law of bourgeois and capitalist property, it is the most essentially, the most actively reforming party, the only one that can give full effect to each of the workers' demands.[24]

From this point of view, this congress did indeed represent a turning point, and all the more so given that it took place at the height of the clash with the Clemenceau government. As we have said, the socialists refused to back his investiture—or more precisely, abstained. The years of his government were characterised by a virulent opposition between the premier and the socialists. Jaurès, who had long entertained links with Clemenceau, forcefully challenged him in the Assembly. This was a respectful exchange but, nonetheless, a robust one, dividing the Left of the time. It set in stone the opposition between the Left 'of order' and that Left which remained

[22] Eugène Fournière, *La sociocratie. Essai de politique positive*, Paris, Giard et Brière, 1910.
[23] *Le Temps*, 16 February 1908.
[24] *Compte-rendu sténographique du congrès national de Toulouse,* Paris, Conseil national de la SFIO, 1909, pp. 484–485.

attached to social change. Yet Guesde was again eclipsed by the parliamentary duel between Jaurès and Clemenceau. What explains the Roubaix MP's weak involvement in this head-to-head battle? In one later article, Alexandre Zévaès recalls how after the fall of Clemenceau in 1909 he wrote to Guesde asking why this latter had not sought a debate with the head of government. Guesde replied 'Jaurès this, Jaurès that … you have given the reason for my silence. To cut down Clemenceau I would first have had to cut down Jaurès, and [the concern for] unity did not allow me to do this.'[25] Two years later, at the Saint-Quentin Congress of 1911, Guesde refused to confront Jaurès. When Rappoport mounted a frontal assault on Jaurès, Guesde publicly disavowed his behaviour.[26] Did Guesde now want to preserve party unity above all else? Or was he perhaps preparing his 'next move', in a bid to take back control after the fall of the Clemenceau government? Had a moment not come in which the SFIO was increasingly susceptible to Jaurès's own phraseology?

Whatever his own intentions, Guesde was gradually becoming marginalised. Once again, his faltering health frequently put him out of action in these years. In 1905 he celebrated his sixtieth birthday—an advanced age in this era. References to his fragile health also recurred in the press. When he headed for the beaches of Royan for a rest spell in summer 1908, a local paper emphasised 'The valiant socialist militant Jules Guesde, MP for Roubaix, is at this moment the guest of our beaches, where he has come to take in the delights of the climate in order to restore his health, shattered by his hard toil'.[27] Returning to his heartlands, Guesde was elected honorary chair of the Fédération du Nord's congress on 20 September 1908, but the actual work of chairing was entrusted to other militants. Absent from the Toulouse Congress, he was then ill for almost a year through 1909. In August 1911 he set off for a rest spell on the island of Jersey[28]; a few months earlier, his serious health situation had stopped him from working. In February that same year, in the middle of a public meeting in Lyons he had to abandon his planned intervention.[29] Whole months of political debate thus rolled on without him.

[25] Alexandre Zévaès, 'Jaurès et Guesde', *Revue de Paris*, juillet 1936, pp. 79–111.

[26] Jean Rabaut, 'Charles Rappoport déconfit ou le coup manqué du Congrès de Saint Quentin', *Bulletin de la Société d'études jaurésiennes*, no. 37, 1970, pp. 1–14.

[27] *Royan*, 14 August 1908 (Archives municipales de la Rochelle).

[28] *L'Humanité*, 14 September 1911.

[29] F7/15965. Sûreté générale report, 22 February 1911.

The writer Léo Larguier has painted a far from glossy portrait which nonetheless provides a likely faithful portrayal of the ageing Guesde: 'never an hour of rest, a moment of true joy! He is one of that breed of fanatics who would, a few centuries ago, have been burnt—or done the burning. Since there are no more stakes to be burnt at, he now burns himself up.'[30]

Most importantly, Guesde repeatedly found himself at odds with the decisions made at the socialist congresses. In 1909, at the Saint-Étienne Congress, the party defined its new agrarian programme. Compère-Morel presented a report on this subject which largely adopted—and added greater definition to—the line set out by the POF since 1894, focused on the defence of small proprietors. Guesde made known his reservations over an approach that did not give enough place to the class struggle. Though he was backed by Vaillant on this point, he was very much in the minority and Compère-Morel's own conclusions were instead adopted. But congress after congress—when he was even able to attend and speak—and in his numerous written interventions, Guesde constantly repeated the same message: propagandise and swell the party's ranks. There was no need for innovation; rather, what needed doing was to repeat the undying foundations and principles of the socialism of the origins. Relating an exchange on a January 1906 train journey taking the two socialist leaders from Paris to a rally in the Guesdist bastion of Troyes, Marcel Sembat noted in his *Carnets* how doggedly Guesde refused to acknowledge partial achievements—or more precisely, his constant underestimation of them. Vaunting the merits of working-class associationism prior to Guesde, Sembat writes, 'Guesde politely noted his approval, like one would congratulate a child who helped the workers mark out the paths through a garden. … I remain struck by how little importance he attached to this.'[31]

In his inflexibility, Guesde had no problem reissuing texts from 1890 without changes, notwithstanding their circumstantial character. During the conflict between the CGT and Clemenceau, he republished old articles in *Le socialisme* that had originally been published in Antide Boyer's *Le Combat*.[32] Similarly, when *Le Mouvement socialiste*—close to the revolutionary syndicalists—attacked Guesde for his anti-strike positions, he replied with an article in the Troyes Guesdist paper *La Défense*—that is, by republishing an article from 1882!

[30] Léo Larguier, *Images républicaines*, Avignon, E. Aubanel, 1945, p. 115.
[31] Marcel Sembat, *Les cahiers noirs 1905–1922*, Paris, Viviane Hamy, 2007, p. 148.
[32] Cited by Marc Angenot, *Le marxisme dans les grands récits* ..., op. cit., p. 374.

Guesde thus did little in the way of self-renewal. In 1909 the Lille workers' press published thousands of copies of *Le pourquoi et le comment du Socialisme ou les considérants de l'ancien programme du POF*—a text by Guesde and Lafargue dating from 1883. The same logic prevailed with the 1912 republication of his old *Essai de catéchisme socialiste*. At most, in these collections we can find a few more recent texts drawn from his parliamentary interventions. Such was the case, for example, with a collection with the ineffably Guesdist title *En garde! Contre les Contrefaçons les Mirages et la Fausse monnaie des Réformes bourgeoises* ('At the Ready! Against the Counterfeits, the Mirages and the Forgeries of Bourgeois Reforms'). Published in 1911, it combined old texts with a few new interventions, such as his speech in opposition to the bill on workers' pensions (to which we shall return). In the preface to this volume, Bracke insisted that Guesde had 'not ceased to warn [the working class] against the arguments, the manoeuvres and the tricks that try to make it change its path'.[33] Even on the eve of the war, Guesde republished his great speeches on the origins of the POF's doctrine, in the collection *Ça et là*.

Lost Battles

Had Guesde given up on winning back the hearts and minds of the party—or even forsaken the revolution itself? In 1909 he exclaimed at the SFIO congress: 'I have remained a revolutionary, I have remained an insurgent',[34] even as he declared that he no longer truly believed in a working-class insurrection. The gap was widening between still-revolutionary rhetoric and practical positions. Guesde maintained positions that no longer really situated him on the left wing of the SFIO, but rather on the side of a kind of 'waiting for the revolution' of which he himself seemed ever less convinced. Meanwhile it was the anti-militarist Gustave Hervé who truly embodied the far left of the party.

What is more, Guesde's partisans now divided over matters of both form and content, for example in votes in the Assembly. Between 1911 and 1914 the socialists drew into closer cooperation with the Parti Radical. In parliamentary votes, it was governmental socialism that was winning

[33] Jules Guesde, *En garde! Contre les Contrefaçons les Mirages et la Fausse monnaie des Réformes bourgeoises*, Polémiques, Paris, Jules Rouff, 1911, p. 7.

[34] *Compte-rendu sténographique du congrès de Saint-Étienne*, Paris, Conseil National de la SFIO, 1909, p. 383.

the day. The SFIO's occasional support for government cabinets (notably Doumergue's) showed an undeniable change of direction. From 1905 to 1914 the party, like the parliamentary group, evolved: certainly, the Parti Socialiste 'born under the sign of the Parti Socialiste De France ended up Jaurèsian'[35] from 1910 onwards.

Added to the party's changed course, a tragedy struck the socialist family which further weakened the Guesdist current—namely, the Lafargues' suicide. In the 28 November 1911 issue of *l'Humanité*, Guesde, Jaurès, Vaillant and Dubreuilh paid moving tributes to their 'friend' Lafargue. Jaurès saluted him with even greater warmth. Guesde had lost a weighty ally: a theorist, Lafargue had expounded Guesdist arguments with a talent and a pamphleteering spirit which made it possible to break the Guesdists out of long, dry and repetitive litanies. He had, moreover, remained a major interlocutor of the German social-democrats. This loss was all the more regrettable in that it had been Lafargue who had alerted Guesde to the dangers of sectarianism, including during the Dreyfus affair. Marx's son-in-law understood that some of the issues that had remained foreign to Guesde risked costing their current dear. The fight against militarism was a telling example in this regard. In the years prior to 1914, Guesde at best tolerated anti-militarist activity, but refused to make it a priority, even as the stamping of boots was beginning to make itself heard across Europe. Nothing discomforted Guesde more than the agitation promoted by Gustave Hervé, and even Jaurès's much more moderate approach. In September 1907, for instance, it seems that just before the planned congress of the International in Stuttgart, Guesde told militants in Grenoble of his hostility towards socialists waging such anti-militarist campaigns—this, even if he was averse 'for the moment, to bring disunity to the party by attacking Jaurès'.[36] Faced with these arguments, which were repeated on multiple occasions, Lafargue privately disclosed his doubts over Guesde's orientation to Gustave Delory, the mayor of Lille: 'Guesde would like to limit the party's whole propaganda and agitation to one question alone, property. … I believe that we should neither ignore nor resist anti-militarist and anti-patriotic agitation.'[37] Guesde could, however, always count on the loyalty of Charles Bonnier in defending the historic line of refusing the various 'antis'. Bonnier virulently attacked them in an

[35] Jean-Jacques Fiechter, *Le socialisme français de l'affaire Dreyfus à la Grande Guerre*, Geneva, Droz, 1965, p. 147.

[36] F7/15965, Commissaire spécial, Gare de Grenoble 15 September 1907.

[37] RGASPI, Moscow, 10. Undated letter, probably from 1907 as Victor Daline suggests.

article wryly entitled 'War on the "Antis"',[38] which could be summarised as follows: down with the anti-clericalists and the anti-militarists who waste the workers' time. Long live the fundamental political battle between capital and the workers, and let's get back to the origins of socialism! The historian Jacques Girault says—not wrongly—of these positions that 'this … rigid reasoning became ever more impoverished as the situation grew tenser'.[39] Rappoport reacted like Lafargue, publishing an ephemeral monthly in 1912 in which he called for consequential action against war. Vaillant, Guesde's former party-comrade between 1902 and 1905, finally distanced himself from him over this point, breaking in favour of Jaurès. This weakened an alliance which had allowed this pair to bear a decisive influence before the creation of the unified party in 1905.

Guesde's refusal to wage the anti-militarist battle thus distanced him from his most solid allies. Again, reading the texts of the opposite side of the political spectrum is instructive, here. *Le Temps* was perhaps right, in 1907, when it asked 'Is Mr. Jules Guesde's influence on the new generations not visibly reducing, and is he not passing to the honourable and decorative but rather vain rank of a simple doctrinaire of socialism?'[40]

The dispute over the first law on pensions even more clearly highlighted this isolation. Before 1910, some pensions systems had already appeared for specific occupations like miners, but there was no general pensions system in 'Belle Époque' France and people often worked until death. In 1910, a bill on 'worker and peasant pensions' was passed almost unanimously in the Chamber, with the support of the Radicals and almost all the socialists. If many of these latter considered that the bill suffered from major shortcomings, it did at least pose the principle of a general pension provision—thus motivating even the most reticent to vote for it.

The spirit of unity prevailed, and all the socialist MPs voted for the bill—except Guesde. He thus became the only Guesdist to act in this way! Returning from Berlin, where he had spent several weeks for medical treatment,[41] he came back just before the planned debate in parliament. Absent and ill, from Berlin he had probably been unable to grasp the balance of forces within the socialist group. Addressing the Chamber on 30–31 March 1910 he held forth against the bill:

[38] Charles Bonnier, 'Guerre aux "Antis"', *Le Socialisme*, 29 May 1909.

[39] Jacques Girault, introduction to the collected reprint of *L'Égalité/Le Socialiste* (unpaginated).

[40] Cited by *La Voix du peuple*, 24 May 1907.

[41] *Le Temps*, 20 January 1910.

> When I came to socialism, as I have conceived it, as I have practiced it, as I have spread it as far and wide as possible, what did I say to the workers? That socialism essentially consists of putting an end to the bosses taking away part of the product of each day's work, which is to say, [it consists] of leaving in the producer's hands the whole of his product … and for the first time I would say—as a socialist, having said and re-said for forty years 'All the product of labour must belong to the worker in the renewed society, and in the current society, he must take back as much as possible of what the capitalist takes from him'; I would say to this worker 'We have to reduce your salaries! It is I who am going to reduce them.' I, a socialist, would sign my name under this reduction! No, no, this is impossible.[42]

Of course, Guesde was not opposed to the principle of pensions for all. Nonetheless, in his view there were many factors justifying opposition to the bill. First was the question of workers' contributions. He fiercely rejected this idea, considering that this was a fresh theft which the worker had to suffer. Secondly, this was, in reality, what Paul Lafargue (on this point in agreement with Guesde, waging a last struggle with him before his suicide) called a 'pension for the dead'. Retirement was to start at sixty-five years of age—an age which very few workers reached in this era. There was a far-ranging debate in *l'Humanité* and then at the socialists' Nîmes Congress in February 1910. Vaillant and Jaurès called on the delegates to vote in favour—a choice confirmed at the congress by a 55–45 per cent margin. There were sharp criticisms of the bill, but the decision to back it won the day. Victor Renard, secretary of the Roubaix CGT's textiles federation (and effectively the Guesdists' spokesman in the unions), criticised the law at the congress, in the hope of amending it as far as possible, but ultimately called for a Yes vote.

How are we to understand Guesde's attitude, here? To pursue his oppositional stance was 'a show of honour, designed to absolve his historical responsibility'.[43] It was also a way of maintaining his loyalty to his principles. While this was a political defeat, Guesde probably thought that he was working for posterity's sake: in his estimation, this type of compromise would end up destroying socialism. His troops had not followed him, even if the socialist press suggested a less one-sided balance of forces than existed within the parliament itself. *Le Socialiste* carried some expressions

[42] Cited in Gilles Candar and Guy Dreux, *Une loi pour les retraites. Débats socialistes et syndicalistes autour de la loi de 1910*, Bordeaux, Le Bord de l'eau, 2010, p. 57.

[43] Ibid., p. 24.

of support for Guesde from the regional press. One such intervention was by Paul Faure, who wrote in *Le Travailleur du Centre* that 'All the yellow types are around Jaurès… Truth be told, I prefer Guesde's isolation.'[44] Isolation—here, even a loyal ally who would be little expected to criticise Guesde let the same word slip.

The idea of strict separation with the bourgeois world did, indeed, still have its followers. Moreover, it is far from impossible that Guesde here gained some credibility, or at least some form of respect, among part of the ranks of the CGT, which he had hitherto fought bitterly. Indeed, his decision to take a stance against the pensions bill did not go unnoticed. We see this in a 9 May 1910 letter by the theorist of revolutionary syndicalism, Georges Sorel, a man who usually thoroughly denounced Guesde as the very emblem of the antidreyfusard anti-syndicalist. Right in the middle of the pensions debate, Sorel wrote to his friend Lanzillo, expressing a certain respect towards Guesde:

> I will perhaps send you something on J. Guesde one of these days. Last year, *Propaganda* published a translation of a biography extracted from *l'Humeur du jour*; it deleted quite a few very nasty things that cropped up in the French text; *I would like to make known to the Italians this man who is a great enemy of our ideas, but who is a very great socialist.*[45]

Violently opposed to revolutionary syndicalism, Guesde did, however, share its spirit of separation. This spirit remained a powerful force in organised socialism and above all in the ranks of the revolutionary syndicalists. Lastly, it is no sure thing that such a situation was entirely to Guesde's discomfort. An old patriarch of socialism, weakened by illness and marginalised in his party, he had proven he could still launch thunderbolts with a certain boldness. Did this embrace of isolation also reveal a certain nostalgia for his young years as a libertarian?

Had Guesde given up on ruling the party—and, even more so, on power itself? Marcel Cachin's *Carnets* relate a discussion that took place a few months after this defeat, where the two men apparently spoke about revolution and the seizure of power.

[44] Reproduced in *Le Socialiste*, 10 April 1910.

[45] '"Cher camarade" Sorel à Lanzillo, 1909–1921', *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Micheletti*, 1993–1994, pp. 103–104.

> 17 January 1911. Lunch with Guesde. How we will make the Revolution. Dictatorship for four days. In these four days, we will put up an appeal to the peasants around France … an appeal to the workers: the working day is paid double and shortened in length. And, in four days, such a movement spreads through the country that nothing will be able to abolish the new regime. During these four days, all newspapers are banned.[46]

Did he still believe this? Perhaps Guesde did still allow himself to dream of *le grand soir*, when the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'—which he thought he had introduced at the local level in Le Nord—could emerge at the national level. Yet he seemed rather more concerned to denounce the left wing of the SFIO and the CGT's revolutionary line than to propose a new strategic plan to win back his majority within the party.

On another essential point, Guesde appeared out of step not only with part of his troops but also with the struggles being waged by the left wing of the Socialist International. While Rosa Luxemburg, for example, denounced Great Power colonialism, Guesde proved largely indifferent. One of Jaurès's victories, from this point of view, was that unlike Guesde he had understood the need to look again at the colonial question. Formally speaking, Guesde and his partisans had denounced colonialism from an early stage: this had even been quite an important point at PSDF congresses. But in 1912 the MP for Le Nord doggedly defended a 'socialist colonisation' plan that would not have been to the dislike of his adversaries on the right wing of the German SPD. Indeed, one of his close friends, Lucien Deslinières, wanted to table a parliamentary bill on 'Socialist Morocco' in the name of the socialist group in the Assembly. This plan did at first enjoy quite some support—thirty-four MPs signed up. It mixed very widespread prejudices of the time with utopian aspirations in continuity with the first socialist projects of the early nineteenth century. He spoke of 'this land, trapped in the anarchy and half-barbarism of the Middle Ages' where 'everything is to be redone, everything is to be started again from scratch. The few European interests that have been able to sink roots there thus far, under the protection of their own homelands, subsist there on a wholly casual basis, without any definite regime.' The alternative to this? 'We must give colonisation a regular organisation'. In short, it was necessary to establish a more egalitarian colonisation, with socialist rules.

[46] Marcel Cachin, *Carnets*, Paris, CNRS, 1993, Vol. 1, 17 January 1911.

> For the first time in the existence of human society, we will see a corner of the planet where destitution and its gloomy trail of ills, vices and crimes will be banished, where the general prosperity, rather than being an average between extreme wealth and extreme poverty, will consist only of individual prosperities.[47]

Guesde ardently defended this 'socialist Morocco' idea. But the weight of the alliance between Vaillant and Jaurès ultimately sank it. Even if no socialist fundamentally challenged the system of domination that it implied, the anti-colonial struggle had in previous years become one of Jaurès's great struggles, in his openness to the plurality of civilisations. Guesde did not make such a turn. As on matters of war, he remained foreign to what he considered 'particular' topics. This led to a de facto neglect of colonised populations' fate.

A Persistent Force

We should, again, be careful, here: Guesde and Guesdism survived in the SFIO. Many party texts bore the trace of a Guesdist vocabulary, reaffirming the—undoubtedly ever more distant—perspective of a revolutionary rupture. The confidence of the workers of Roubaix ensured that Guesde was re-elected an MP in 1910. At the national level, he maintained the esteem of a great number of militants, even if he had been pushed into the minority. In a *Dictionnaire du socialisme* in 1911, one of his partisans, Charles Vérecque, continued to make a living legend of Guesde, presenting him in the following terms: 'After the Commune, as the Versaillais repression still struck, Jules Guesde was the first man to introduce collectivism to France. He is the militant who has worked most for the social Revolution.'[48] Even if he was no innovator, Guesde did at least embody a heroic history. Guesdist press periodically saluted the 'veneration' which surrounded him:

> Guesde's arrival in Roubaix is always the occasion for an imposing working-class demonstration where fondness and veneration for our friend combine: the one that greeted him on Monday was finer and more moving than any before … the crowd of 15 to 20,000 people broke out in cheering to salute the veteran of workers' struggles.[49]

[47] Lucien Deslinières, *Le Maroc socialiste*, Paris, Giard et Brière, 1912, p. 7.
[48] Charles Vérecque, *Dictionnaire du socialisme*, Paris Giard et Brière, 1911.
[49] *Le Socialisme*, 24 June 1911.

Such adulation did not escape the best-informed observers of the political forces of the time. For the sociologist Robert Michels, who published his *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* in Germany in 1911, Guesde was the authority figure *par excellence*. He highlighted 'the idolatrous worship paid today in the department of the Nord … to the Marxist prophet Jules Guesde'.[50]

Guesde's partisans continued to play an active role in the party. The ageing Guesde did not shut the door behind him but worked on his succession. This was a matter of doctrine but also of appearances: the hat and the cravat still represented two distinctive markers. Guesdism was also a way of putting militant friendship and camaraderie on display, though for others this looked like factional behaviour. The current was no longer making headway, but it was still able to consolidate its fortresses in *départements* like Le Nord, l'Aube and l'Allier. New socialist figures were also emerging, such as Jean Lebas. At party congresses, Bracke and Cachin defended Guesde's positions, even in his absence. There was a certain dynamism, here, especially at the editorial level. Lucien Roland ensured the continued running of the party publisher and the Guesdists also founded *Le socialisme*—a weekly review that kept their current's flame alive. Judging by the internal archives of the Fédération du Nord, where they had the densest web of militants, its sales figures seem to have been modest.[51] Like all socialist reviews of this era containing articles of a certain depth, this was probably read essentially by an activist elite. Jules Guesde himself edited *Le socialisme* but wrote for it very little indeed. This was a striking contrast with the years of *Le Cri du peuple*, when his written contributions were both rancorous and verbose. The content of *Le socialisme* was far from surprising: the Guesdists here repeated their line on various subjects, often without great originality. But it would be unfair to see nothing in this other than a wearisome, doctrinaire prose: for instance, Pierre Brizon, a militant from l'Allier, contributed unique studies on French rural society.[52]

Many later commentators passed negative judgements on *Le socialisme*. Doubtless this review had neither the freshness of the debates in Jaurès's

[50] Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, London, Transaction, p. 95.

[51] ADN. Fédération du Nord du PS. 198 J 133.

[52] Pierre Roy, *Pierre Brizon pacifiste. Député socialiste de l'Allier, pèlerin de Kienthal*, Nonette, Créer, 2004.

l'Humanité nor the theoretical depth of either *la Revue socialiste* or *le Mouvement socialiste*. Nonetheless, while it was often repetitive—applying elements of doctrine to the French situation—it did give over considerable space to international debates and published translations of foreign-language texts by minorities critical of the majority line in the International. From this point of view, *Le socialisme* played a role in breaching the borders for militants of multiple nationalities, something the historian ought not underestimate. For example, for the twenty-fifth anniversary of Marx's death in 1908 it published a set of contributions as homage to the founder of scientific socialism: here we find the prestigious signatures of Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Plekhanov and Martov, the English socialist Hyndman, the Dutch socialist Henriette Roland-Holst and indeed Clara Zetkin. A few years later, it featured multiple contributions by Anton Pannekoek, the future theorist of workers' councils.[53] Here we also regularly come across the name of an old acquaintance of Guesde's, Christian Rakovsky. The Russian Charles Rappoport played an important role, here, though formally speaking he was not a member of the editorial board. At the crossroads of several different worlds, he remained loyal to Guesde and to *Le socialisme*, before breaking from him on the eve of World War I.

This openness raises the question of Guesde's place on the international stage. He had doubtless been 'overtaken' by Jaurès, with his dogged fight against war, already some years previously. As a sign of the times, upon Bebel's death in 1913 Karl Kautsky sent a letter to Victor Adler, the foremost representative of Austrian social democracy. Denying that the French had it in them to represent an authority at the international level, Kautsky emphasised that Jaurès would, nonetheless, be the best-placed figure if the Austrian leader was unable to step up to this role: 'Since August's death, the International has but one leader, you. … Apart from you Jaures is the only one who enjoys international prestige, but he has very little knowledge of other countries, even if he knows more than the French do on average.'[54] This was a spectacular reversal of fortunes: after all, just fifteen years earlier Kautsky had written to Guesde in order to organise the marginalisation of Jaurès. The prestige which Guesde could draw from his contacts from the early years, from Marx to Liebknecht, no longer played to his advantage. Rosa Luxemburg was very critical of Jaurès and never

[53] Anton Pannekoek, 'Sur la révolution mondiale', *Le Socialisme*, 21 January 1912.

[54] Karl Kautsky to Victor Adler, 13 February 1914, in Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel mit August Bebel und Karl Kautsky*, Vienna, Verlag der Wiener Volksbuchhandlung, 1954, p. 592.

publicly spoke out against the Guesdists, for fear of playing the Jaurèsians' game. Yet even she did not have boundless confidence in Guesde: indeed, she clearly preferred Vaillant over him. This did not mean breaking off ties. When Guesde came to Berlin for extensive treatment by a German social-democratic doctor—Dr. Vogt—from January to March 1910, Luxemburg warmly invited him to come for discussions at her home.[55] On 21 January 1913, responding to a question of Guesde's regarding the management of the German railways and the positions of the SPD, Luxemburg replied with a long letter rich in information on this point, before concluding with remarks on the 'revisionist' positions in the German party.[56] While the Guesdists seemed well on their way to marginalisation in France, at the international level 'their revolutionary capital had not been used up, had not disappeared in the eyes of everyone, and it was still lively enough for Lenin and Luxemburg to look toward them'.[57] The circulation of Guesde's texts in foreign languages attested to this continued prestige: for example, in the wake of the 1905 revolution many of his texts were translated and distributed in Russian.

Beyond the network around *Le socialisme*, in their federations the Guesdists were behind major bookshops and libraries linked to federation-level newspapers. The factional struggle within the party proceeded by way of propaganda and publications: and on this level, the Guesdists still knew how to take up ground.[58] 'In the SFIO and on its margins, there was a proliferation of editorial projects in the interests of codification', remarks the historian Vincent Chambarlhac.[59] Indeed, there are many telling examples to illustrate this relative dynamism. Without doubt the largest-scale project was a vast *Encyclopédie ouvrière, syndicale et cooperative*, a multi-volume work which retraced the history of the Parti Socialiste, from local federations up to the international level. Compère-Morel had a notable role in driving this project.[60] A collective work which mobilised the

[55] IISG J. G. Letter from Rosa Luxemburg to Jules Guesde, 15 February 1910.

[56] IISG J. G. Letter from Rosa Luxemburg to Jules Guesde, 21 January 1913. Unfortunately the letter breaks off abruptly, as the final part is missing.

[57] Madeleine Rebérioux, 'L'héritage de Guesde', *Démocratie nouvelle*, 1966, p. 26.

[58] Frédéric Cépède, 'La SFIO des années 1905–1914: construire le parti', *Cahiers Jaurès*, 1/2008, pp. 29–45.

[59] Vincent Chambarlhac, 'L'orthodoxie marxiste de la SFIO: à propos d'une fausse évidence (1905–1914)', *Cahiers d'histoire-Revue d'histoire critique*, January–March 2011, p. 47.

[60] Adéodat Compère-Morel (ed.), *Encyclopédie socialiste, syndicale et coopérative de l'Internationale ouvrière*, Paris, Aristide Quillet, 1912–1921.

party's various writers, was this a kind of revenge on Jaurès's own *L'Histoire socialiste de la France contemporaine*? Any attempt to equate the two would only be half-right, for Guesde did not himself make any intervention; even if his lieutenants were acting on orders, this was a much broader endeavour. The preface to the first volume—very Guesdist in its intentions—gave an idea of the general tone:

> By no means are we innovators in the field of sociology and we have not discovered a new socialism. Not only have we no intention here of contributing or expounding new and original theories, but we do not even have the pretention of presenting the social problem in any way other than our doctrinaires have presented it in the many works that they have published.[61]

Compère-Morel and Jean Lorris thus assigned the volumes in this series 'a simple popularising function'. Guesde's allies were particularly keen to make their imprint on the party's identity, and this is how we should understand the launch of this *Encyclopedia*. Should we see this as a 'Guesdist bid for hegemony', as the historian Madeleine Rebérioux concludes?[62] Probably, yes. In any case, the desire was there. Careful not to appear as a merely sectarian endeavour, it sought to look beyond party ranks alone: indeed, it was published by Aristide Quillet. Jean Lorris and Paul Grados's 1913 publication of *Petit-Pierre sera socialiste* in Armand Colin's 'Tu seras …' collection made up part of this same dynamic. This book's target was youth—indeed, it was inspired by the pedagogical model of the *Tour de France par deux enfants*. At the same time, *Le socialisme*'s poor sales were combined with the abandonment of the party publisher in 1913.

What conclusions should we draw from this policy on publishing and editorial matters? Compared to the German social-democrats' efforts, all this was still rather modest. Most importantly, the Guesdists did not publish any major theoretical contributions, even as theories on the evolution of capitalism abounded in the Second International. This was an old problem of the Guesdists' Marxism, which had already been repetitive back in the 1890s and was less creative than ever. So, what could Marx and Marxism mean in such a context? For them, 'in the French situation [the

[61] Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 4.

[62] Madeleine Rebérioux, 'Guesdisme et culture politique: recherches sur l'Encyclopédie socialiste de Compère-Morel', *Mélanges d'histoire sociale offerts à Jean Maitron*, Paris, Les Éditions ouvrières, 1976, pp. 211–227.

reference to Marx] meant a name, a position to take, a way of being in the SFIO, more than a call for a return to the texts'.[63] In short, it was one means of identification like any other, rather than a method which called for reflection. Maintaining their hold over a good part of the party's press structures, the Guesdists helped construct a system of collective reference points, as embodied by Guesde's own still-prestigious name. A simple study of the texts, which highlighted the repetitive aspects of these pieces and their lack of innovation, would inevitably arrive at conclusions which pointed to a decline and impoverishment of Marxism—that is, conclusions contrary to perceptions among a certain section of the socialist militants of the time.

Guesde openly professed his hostility to partial struggles. This was, doubtless, caricatural and lacking in theorisation, but it still had a power of attraction. If we want to understand how this was possible, historical distance is often a good counsellor. Let's read Jean-Jacques Piette invoking his memory of Guesde half a century later. Critical of the MP for Le Nord, he nonetheless emphasised the strength of his implantation and sought to understand his lasting popularity. The few remarks he offers seem like a precious resource for grasping the power of attraction that Guesde's current had maintained:

> Ultimately, was Guesde perhaps right anyway, to the degree that the problem of the war came up quickly. … Is it that if the Party and the International had followed. … Jaurès's theoretical analyses, the war would really have been avoided? I don't believe so. The economic roots were already such that it couldn't have been avoided anyhow.[64]

Guesde did not seem to have believed that the war would break out: an incontestable error in his perspective. But here Piette poses a problem important for understanding the socialist mentality of these years. For many militants, the fight against capitalism counted for more than everything else: battles linked to some specific domain only had a much lesser importance. To put that another way—in consistently reaffirming that the only real struggle was the struggle against capitalism, Guesde made no innovation, and other struggles of his time—of which the colonial

[63] Vincent Chambarlhac 'L'Encyclopédie socialiste, une forme singulière pour une cause politique?', *Genèses*, no. 57, 4/2004, pp. 4–24.

[64] Jean-Jacques Piette, 'L'héritage de Guesde...', *Démocratie nouvelle*, March 1966, p. 29.

question is one of the most striking examples—passed him by. But through his consistent emphasis on the system's capacity for resistance and its 'economic roots', he was, in a certain sense, always right, so long as capitalism existed. Even if they were dogmatic and far from innovative, the principles he defended thus remained credible.

All the same, faced with the test of history the contradictions were becoming more acute. Like all socialism, Guesdism would soon be overwhelmed and torn apart by the event which Jaurès so feared: the outbreak of a new war with Germany. In August 1914 there came a major twist in the drama, and a last paradox in Guesde's career. Even after years in which his support in the party had been fragmenting, he would now find himself in the forefront of national history.



CHAPTER 6

‘Without Him, It’s No Longer the Same Thing’: Guesde the Minister and Guardian of Unity (1914–1922)

Making reference to Guesde’s activity, Jaurès spoke of his ‘Parliamentary and electoral agitation on the one side, and appeal to revolutionary force on the other: it’s a brazen method, and in the speed of events it can escape its own contradictions, but in the long run the contradiction must explode’.[1] Did August 1914 not bring this contradiction out into the open, a few days after Jaurès’s death? In 1899 Guesde had been the sworn opponent of ‘ministerialism’. Now, in a decisive moment of the country’s history, he became a minister in a government of national defence. Then, in 1920, the man who had held aloft the flame of revolution refused the new model proposed by the Russian Revolution, choosing to remain in the socialist *vieille maison*. These were two choices key to his final years, a period where he continued to be enfeebled by illness and now, also, by old age: in 1915 he celebrated reaching seventy years of age. Despite this, Guesde continued to be a front-rank figure of historical socialism: his convictions still found an echo among his loyal allies, some of whom now occupied political positions of no little significance. His choices also have to be understood in their context: in 1914 as in 1920, the apostle of socialism had not yet said his last word.

[1] Jean Jaurès, *Préface aux discours parlementaires. Le socialisme et le radicalisme en 1885*, Paris, Cornély, 1904, p. 73.

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J.-N. Ducange, *Jules Guesde*, Marx, Engels, and Marxisms,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-34610-2_6

A *Force Tranquille*[2]

In early 1914, his old friend Bracke succeeded him as chief editor of the Guesdist review *Le socialisme*. This periodical now changed its name, as if better to express the identity of a current in decline; hence, the ephemeral *Le Socialisme et lutte de classe* was born, which did not survive the outbreak of the war. One innovation worth underlining, here, is the fact that this 'French-language Marxist review' brought together collaborators from Francophone, Belgian and Swiss socialist milieus. Guesde had stepped aside, but for the group behind the review his moral authority remained irreplaceable. In a missive probably dating to the moment of the new publication's very first issues, Bracke sent Guesde a French translation of two unpublished letters by Engels (addressed to his correspondent Jean-Philippe Becker) asking him if it would be worth publishing them in the pages of *Le Socialisme et lutte de classe*. The second letter from January 1878 referred to the origins of the Parti Ouvrier and thus directly concerned Guesde's own youth. But it also contained other elaborations which made it much more than a simple historical document. Concluding on the risks Russia would be running should it go to war, Engels declared: 'an unsuccessful war or one bringing fresh reversals will surely make revolution break out in St Petersburg'. Bracke could hardly have imagined how prophetic these phrases from 1878—which he wanted to publish in 1914—would one day prove.

For now, the SFIO's political campaigns were proving their effectiveness. While the threat of armed conflict was sharper than ever, in spring 1914 the socialists won a great victory in the parliamentary elections. Like his comrades, Guesde took part in a nationwide campaign focused on peace, as against the 'madness of arms'. He revolted against the law on three years' military service, a 'window dressing of a law, pointless, ineffective and dangerous'.[3] He fought for proportional representation in elections and for a 'revision of the constitution'. Notably, he advanced a historic socialist demand inherited from the republican tradition—namely, a call for the abolition of the senate ('the rampart of social reaction', the 'greatest obstacle to progress').

[2] 'Force tranquille' is a later expression, used by the socialist candidate François Mitterrand in his 1981 presidential campaign. The campaign advertisement displayed Mitterrand's calm demeanour, standing in front of a French village. In 1981 this same demeanour would be synonymous with victory.

[3] IISG J. G., File on the 1914 parliamentary election campaign.

The manner in which Guesde campaigned showed the important shifts that had taken place: he was no longer the combative revolutionary of 1893, but the representative of a great party, en route to another term as MP. His campaign stretched from a cinema screening to the opening of a dance—and he also staged 'concert-rallies'. Guesde consistently presented himself as the legitimate, well-rooted MP for this constituency, like a local notable whose re-election was close to certain. Bracke and Roubaix's new mayor Jean Lebas were often also on the platform at his talks. But all this was far from the vigour and the sharp conflicts that had marked the campaigns of the 1890s. Certainly, even now Guesde's adversaries were not gifting him anything; however, a sort of 'force tranquille' had taken hold. The Radicals openly called for a vote for Guesde: 'Radical and Radical-Socialist voters are conscious enough of their duty to know that in no case must they grant their votes to anyone other than the candidates of the secular, reforming Republic of social progress. Down with Reaction! Always to the Left!'[4] Faced with Guesde, the Catholic right tried to set up an alternative between 'the képi and the spiked helmet' and relentlessly denounced his closeness to the German social-democrats. Advocating the organisation of militias instead of the standing army, Guesde was, they claimed, preparing for a French debacle, should war ever come. But all this was to no avail: voters sent him back to Parliament without too much difficulty, on 54 per cent of the vote.

Had Guesde become a respected 'treasure', perhaps at the cost of a certain softening, a break with the struggles of yesteryear? This was what more radical socialists and syndicalists bitterly denounced. Was he now just an old baron of this region—witness to a falsely intransigent socialism, the inheritance of a different era?

In any case, Guesde now seemed more committed to his double language than ever before. Indeed, despite the propaganda he promoted, there is no evidence that he was now convinced by the threat of war hanging over Europe. He respected party discipline and participated in the national-level campaign. But if we look at the stances that Guesde personally took, we can see that the idea of preventing war at all cost was not his own priority. Indeed, he swung between underestimating the risk of war and a virulent denunciation of the idea that the general strike was an appropriate means to stop it. At the SFIO congress held in Paris in mid-July 1914, Guesde and his loyal Fédération du Nord opposed the general

[4] IISG J. G. Pamphlets du comité-Guesde (7e circ. de Lille), 1914.

strike and in particular the amendment by Vaillant and Keir Hardie, who proposed that such a strike should be launched in case of war. According to this amendment—intended to be tabled at the International's coming congress in Vienna—workers should block production and refuse to serve as cannon fodder. However, its message remained ambiguous, in that the strike would be a pre-emptive action and did not, formally speaking, imply any rejection of national defence in case of enemy aggression. Guesde stated his opposition to this vision and in effect declared that rallying to the war effort was a possibility if what he called 'socialist civilisation' came under threat.

> Suppose a war broke out between Germany and Russia: socialist Germany, which would want to revolt and could do so, and socialist Russia, which would perhaps like to do so but could not. This would be to hand over German socialist civilisation to the onrush of the Russian autocracy's army. This is why at a socialist congress, never, never, never will a conscious socialist vote for a general strike in case of war.[5]

Mounting a rapid tour of the balance of forces in each country, Guesde noted that the forces prepared for insurrection could be counted on the fingers of one hand. With such low numbers available in most countries, socialism would surely be crushed by such an adventure, for it would be left as a small minority. But Guesde was defeated, here, at least in terms of what the socialists said they would do: for opposing him were Vaillant and Jaurès, who insisted that the general strike was the proper response faced with the danger of war.

Not long after this, Guesde took part in the final meeting of the International Socialist Bureau (the Socialist International's leadership body), held in late July 1914. Guesde made next to no intervention in this last meeting; it is impossible to know in any detail what he was thinking, here, but there is good reason to bet that he would again have found the debate on the general strike little-appropriate. He said almost nothing, leaving it up to Jaurès to huff and puff about warding off the risk of conflict. A few days later, Europe tipped into war. And with it, the history of the Parti Socialiste switched into a different gear.

[5] Cited by Alexandre Zévaès, *Histoire du Parti socialiste en France 1904–1923*, Paris, Librairie Marcel Rivière, 1912, p. 101.

Rallying to France

On 31 July 1914, Jean Jaurès was assassinated in Paris's Café du Croissant. Had he lived, what would he have done in the subsequent days as war broke out across Europe? Whole books have been filled with political and historiographical debates on this point. Permitting a measure of counterfactual history, recent works of historiography have tended to accept that Jaurès would have accepted the Union sacrée, albeit with a heaviest of hearts and only after having fought to the last to prevent war—before probably becoming an opponent of a long and ever more murderous conflict.[6] But when—and how—he would have made this turn remains an open question.

In any case, for many socialists who had long stood by Jaurès and now presented themselves as his heirs, there was no room for doubt. Perhaps through resignation—but for this, no less unfailingly—they supported the defence of the *patrie*, which they considered the victim of the Kaiser's aggression. This was, in any case, what the socialist parliamentarians chose to do: the whole of France, from far right to far left, vowed to defend the *patrie*. Jaurès's successor at the head of *l'Humanité*, Pierre Renaudel, made the pacifist paper into an organ of 'war socialism'.[7] The reflex to defend a *patrie* that had come under attack—itself facilitated by a propaganda which mobilised the heroic memory of the French Revolution—was operating at full tilt, here. For now, the revolutionary minorities were limited to a few tiny groups. But they highlighted—and not without real arguments—how powerfully the Parti Socialiste had been integrated into the French nation.

For the moment, in the France of August 1914 the Union sacrée sparked next to no controversy among the French socialists. They showed no hesitation in turning against what they had long professed at the socialist congresses. Formally speaking, the CGT was still under the hegemony of a majority boasting a number of ardent revolutionaries. Yet it, too, rallied to the Union sacrée. The anti-patriotic far left of the SFIO around Gustave Hervé did the same, notwithstanding the fact that for years it had spoken only of 'social war' and damned the spinelessness of other currents—though a certain shift in its own position can be detected even starting in 1912.[8] Édouard Vaillant, the prestigious communard from 1871 and one of the international symbols of the fight against war, one of

[6] Gilles Candar, Vincent Duclert, *Jean Jaurès*, Paris, Fayard, 2014.

[7] An old but well-documented volume is still useful, here: Jean-Jacques Becker et Annie Kriegel, *1914. La guerre et le mouvement ouvrier français*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1964.

[8] Gilles Heuré, *Gustave Hervé. Itinéraire d'un provocateur*, Paris, La Découverte, 1997.

the great voices of the SFIO abroad, himself rediscovered the tones of the war of 1870 and showed himself to be an ardent patriot. Thus, the general strike did not materialise anywhere beyond the resolutions of the socialist and trade-union congresses.

What about Jules Guesde? An MP, he together with all his comrades endorsed the vote for war credits on 4 August 1914. The German social-democrats to whom he had long been tied followed the same path. Links were broken between once friendly parties. In one draft text, Guesde asked 'Could the German socialist democracy [sic] not have as been as one with the German Empire in attacking us and invading us—and could the French socialists not have been as one with the French Republic in defending us?'[9] In Britain only a few figures in the Labour Party opposed the war. The socialists in Austria-Hungary similarly backed the war effort, though here there was no vote in parliament. Matters were more varied in Eastern Europe: both factions of Russian social democracy, Bolshevik and Menshevik, refused to endorse war credits. At the moment that Europe's armies were about to devastate the continent, one first thing had definitively broken already: the unity of international socialism.

There was, however, debate among the French socialists as to whether they should join the government. Initially, the socialist parliamentary group rejected this. Guesde and Vaillant, ardent defenders of the new *Union sacrée* (though they did not use this term, preferring to speak of 'national defence'), were opposed to such a move. But the creation of a permanent commission made up of ten socialist leaders (including Guesde and two of his close friends, Bracke and Compère-Morel) ultimately resulted in a *Manifeste au pays* which called on the socialists to join the government. Guesde and Marcel Sembat joined first as part of Viviani's cabinet. Especially explaining their positions was the invasion of France on 26 August, which made the threat more pressing than it had been at the beginning of the month. This was how the *Manifeste* justified their participation in government—the first time any socialist had made such a choice since the Millerand affair in 1899:

> Following regular deliberation, through a carefully weighed decision, the socialist party has authorised two of its members, our friends Jules Guesde and Marcel Sembat, to enter the government, and it has made them its delegates for national defence … [the prime minister] knew that at all grave

[9] IISG J. G. Manuscript 'La démocratie-socialiste allemande …' (1914–1918).

> moments, in 1793 as in 1870, it has been in these men, in these socialists, in these revolutionaries, that the nation has placed its confidence. … The presence of our friends in government will be the guarantee for all that republican democracy is prepared to fight to the last. … Today, like yesterday, after the first tests as in the enthusiasm of mobilisation, we have the certainty that we fight not only for the existence of the Patrie, not only for the greatness of France, but for freedom, the Republic, for civilisation.[10]

Such a scene would have been unthinkable even a few weeks earlier: Guesde met the president of the Republic, Raymond Poincaré, for a discussion of the aims and direction of his participation in government. Poincaré himself seemed surprised by the situation. He noted in his diary:

> Friday 14 August. At his request, I receive one of the socialist leaders, Mr. Jules Guesde, of whom I was long a parliamentary colleague but with whom I have had no personal relations. He is an inflexible and loyal doctrinaire with rigid ideas, of a morose logic, of a rather sharp word, of wavy hair and a long beard.[11]

They talked over the intended purpose of the war effort, the imperative need to do away with the German Empire and the future of Alsace-Lorraine. 'And we departed with the sentiment of being united, unto death.' The war had brought together two men which everything else had opposed.

Guesde thus became a minister without portfolio (that is, an essentially symbolic role) in Viviani's cabinet, and then Minister of State in Aristide Briand's government. From 26 August 1914 to 12 December 1916 Minister Guesde sat alongside two other socialists in the cabinet, Albert Thomas and Marcel Sembat. The elements most hostile to socialism expressed their satisfaction with these figures' decision to rally behind the government, sometimes in a certain sneering tone. For instance, Alfred Capus, a member of the Académie Française, published an article in the 11 February 1915 issue of *Le Figaro* in which he saluted Guesde's commitment to the government.[12] The

[10] According to Hubert-Rouger in Adéodat Compère-Morel, *Encyclopédie socialiste, syndicale et coopérative de l'Internationale ouvrière*, Paris, Aristide Quillet, 1912–1921, vol. 1, pp. 345–347.

[11] Raymond Poincaré, *Au service de la France. Neuf années de souvenirs*, Paris, Plon, 1928, vol. 5, pp. 91–93.

[12] Alfred Capus, 'Déclarations socialistes', *Le Figaro*, 11 February 1915.

novelist referred with delight to the 'statements of Messieurs. Jules Guesde and Marcel Sembat', adding that 'apart from such stylistic points, they contain an excellent war doctrine'. Doubtless there remained 'stylistic points … which Mr. Jules Guesde could not but use, on pain of recanting all his ideas'. But Guesde was also accused of 'excessive naivety' in extending a hand to the German people in the event that they 'got rid of the Kaiser and Prussian imperialism'. Guesde's attitude thus brought him the respect of almost the entire remainder of the political spectrum, even if not all past hatreds disappeared. For instance, a police report emphasised how 'certain impenitent antisemites pretend that Mr. Jules Guesde descends from a Jewish family of German origin and that Mr. Viviani's father was an Israelite'.[13]

Fighting Prussian Imperialism

Guesde's line of argument may seem rather acrobatic, especially in light of the Parti Ouvrier's ancestral struggles. This has sometimes been understood as treachery by a socialist who had simply given up on his convictions. But if with hindsight Guesde patently underestimated the terrible consequences of this conflict, it is also worth working through the arguments which he actually put forward. If these should not necessarily be taken at face value, it does seem necessary to examine his line of defence in its proper context, in particular given that it was shared by a large share of his partisans (if, it is true, not all of them—and we shall return to this). A letter from one militant well summarised a sentiment in which many socialists now shared:

> Through the sacrifice he has made, Guesde has grown as a historical figure. The fact that others reproach his inaction is an injustice. Guesde in the government is a symbol. This is socialism placing France above its own particular preoccupations.[14]

First of all, Guesde had never seen anti-militarist activity as a panacea; he had repeatedly and openly attacked it at several congresses following unification in 1905. Guesde allies and in particular Compère-Morel bear witness to the fact that he thus had next to no problem positioning himself in favour of national defence in 1914. What followed was, in a sense, a

[13] AN F7/15965. Report from 3 November 1915.
[14] IISG J. G., Letter from Bruneta to Paul Melgrani, 15 July 1916 (roneoed copy).

repeat of the spirit of 'all out defence' previously seen in 1870. Indeed, albeit with some wavering, since 1893 the idea of saving the *Patrie* had been anything but foreign to Guesde. He insisted that he was not the abstract internationalist constantly described by his opponents, who emphasised his old ties with German militants.

Another argument reactivated the old debate among socialists, over the opposition between Republic and the monarchy. The passages cited earlier in the text set the tone: if the Germans stood in solidarity with their emperor, what sense could it make for the French to abandon the Republic? Guesde had long drawn an equivalence between the two: all that mattered was which social class ruled. Here there was a clear turning point, but that did not mean that he considered that the Republic such as it already existed represented the future. Rather, he adopted an argument from Engels which emphasised the full importance of defending the Republic—not because it was perfect but rather because it represented the most advanced political regime, allowing the class struggle to be waged in the best possible conditions. For example, in Guesde we would search in vain for any unconditional defence of France's political institutions during the war: all that counted was the final goal, socialism. Yet the bid to achieve this in present conditions would, despite everything, have an easier time in a Republic than under a monarchy.

This argument was combined with another, which Guesde repeated on several occasions, namely, that this was not a matter of socialists governing the country. It was necessary not to govern, but to fight, and even declare that the Union sacrée would become a form of 'deception' if it continued into peacetime. Hostilities would resume, sooner or later. In his personal papers he set out a few considerations in justification of his stance, in this same spirit:

> Political and governmental collaboration among the classes is always and necessarily *conservative* in spirit; but in times of piece, in social matters, what it tends to *conserve* is capitalist society, which must be destroyed for the sake of the emancipation of labour and humanity. And that it is why it must be condemned as the ultimate deception. But what it is called on to *conserve* in the case of invasion, in matters of national defence, is the *nation*, which is at once the indispensable framework for working-class action today and the condition of the insurrection of tomorrow. And in this sense it must be the duty of socialists.[15]

[15] IISG J. G., Manuscript 'La collaboration politique … des classes' (1916).

Once the nation had been saved, the class struggle (or even, therefore, the insurrection) would resume its proper place. For Guesde as for many socialists, it could be taken for given that a country which embodied the direction of history could be supported against a 'barbaric' nation. From this point of view, for Guesde there was no counterposition between the anti-ministerialism of 1899 and the action he took in 1914. A minister 'without portfolio', he took part in the defence of national territory but not directly, in managing the state, except from a purely technical point of view. Indeed, unlike other socialist ministers, he did not propose any reforms within this framework. This did not mean that he was inactive: for example, the military high command and the Ministry of War sent him a series of documents on the present situation; he also took part in the '(Interministerial) Committee for Aiding the Reconstruction of Regions Invaded or Affected by Acts of War'. But in reality, Guesde was little moved to participate in the concrete running of the government and indeed repeatedly justified adopting such a stance. In this regard, he clearly differentiated himself from his colleague and comrade Albert Thomas, who became Minister of Armaments in May 1915. Thomas considered his own action the continuation of the reformist socialism he had expounded before the war—an interventionist approach in which Guesde did not share, though he also held back from criticism, as governmental solidarity demanded.[16]

Apart from his personal notes and a few short interventions, it is difficult to find any long text where Guesde explained and justifies his position. The archives of his chief of staff Charles Duma mainly consist of administrative correspondence, requesting this or that favour from the old socialist leader. In very few cases there were challenges to his positions on the conflict itself. For instance, in response to a letter from a certain Ricaud, Guesde reaffirmed his own point of view and expressed opposition to any political agitation that might undermine the war effort:

> Dear comrade
>
> We should not forget that we are moving in the context of capitalist society and that, by consequence, the injustices which you highlight continue as normal. We have accepted a role in government only in order to participate in the national defence. As for all the rest, we know that so long as socialism

[16] Adeline Blaszkiewicz-Maison, *Albert Thomas. Le socialisme en guerre 1914–1918*, Rennes, PUR, 2015, pp. 54–55.

> is not fully in power, things will continue and nothing can be done about it. To those who ask if one can create socialist groups—there is no place to create political groupings in the army; the soldiers form a single group, and they must form just one at the present time: [the grouping] of national defence.[17]

Reading a rather more prolific writer like Charles Dumas allows us to understand what encouraged Guesde to maintain his position even as the conflict became increasingly drawn-out. In a pamphlet where he was presented as the 'Former MP and "chief of staff to Mr. Guesde"', Dumas crossed swords with Christian Rakovsky. This latter was opposed to the war and favoured his own country taking a neutral stance; he was, moreover, an old acquaintance of Guesde's, having met him in Paris in the early 1890s. From this point of view, this pamphlet was a document of the highest importance. For those able to lay their hands on this text, printed in Romania, there can be no doubt that Dumas was defending the viewpoint of Minister Guesde, too.[18]

What, then, were the key points of this 'discussion between French and Romanian socialists'? Dumas clearly declared himself in continuity with historical socialism: 'We French socialists, who have the certainty that in this torment we have neither lost our heads nor abdicated any of our principles, claim precisely to have based our attitude on these same principles and on the interest of socialism'.[19]

Dumas conceded that 'bourgeois and capitalist France has its heavy share of responsibility in the conflict' but it would be 'puerile to expect, as certain German socialist democrats [sic] do, that the death of German militarism and imperialism [would result] from its triumph'.[20] Optimism was in order: he argued that in case of French victory, 'imperialism … is an idea we will cast out of European thought'.

For his part, Rakovsky denounced the 'abdication' which this truce in the class struggle represented. 'You the "Guesdists", at all the national and international socialist congresses the much-heard and admired defenders of the *irreducible class struggle*, have you recommended and carried out

[17] Archives Charles Dumas, Institut d'Histoire Sociale (Nanterre 'La Souvarine'). Letter addressed to Monsieur Ricaud (undated).

[18] Charles Dumas, Christian Rakovsky, *Les socialistes et la guerre: discussion entre socialistes français et socialistes roumains*, Bucharest, Cercul de editură socialistă, 1915 (BDIC Nanterre).

[19] Ibid., p. 7.

[20] Ibid., p. 8.

class abdication?' His whole line of argument was based on recalling what Guesde had once been and what he represented for his generation. He reviewed in detail the anti-governmental positions which Guesde had taken at the Socialist International's congresses: his path to becoming a minister was, in this view, condemned by his own prior actions. Rakovsky moved nostalgically from references to 'you' to references to 'us'; in one revealing formula, he presented the left wing of international socialism as having been under his former teacher's patronage, as he spoke of 'We, the old "Guesdists"'.[21] He concluded his argument 'wishing to stick by revolutionary socialism, which was yesterday the source of your strength'.[22] Rakovsky sought nothing else but to revive the Guesdism of yesteryear, the former bearer of the revolutionary idea.

Lastly, it is worth noting that Rakovsky repeatedly invoked Engels's authority in order to justify his viewpoint. A battle for legitimacy was raging to decide who was most loyal to the founding father of scientific socialism. Indeed, the shadow of this 'general' of German social democracy loomed over a hard-fought conflict: Dumas's papers include a letter addressed to Guesde, which is interesting, in this regard. Unfortunately, it is anonymous, though it was probably written by Bracke. It emphasised the great interest of a then-unknown text by Engels, a man with a great passion for military history, which passed a very severe judgement on 'Russian Tsarism's foreign policy'. Fifteen years later, this text would be criticised in the very highest circles in the USSR—indeed, by Stalin in person—on account of its exaggeratedly anti-Russian tone.[23] But that's a whole different matter.

Whether or not he was, indeed, loyal to Engels, Guesde was relentless in justifying and defending his political line, which he reaffirmed on multiple occasions. Little disposed to accepting any kind of criticism, he insisted, for instance, at a 14 July 1915 intervention at the Parti Socialiste's national council, that:

> I have never followed the crowds. I have made the crowds' own opinion. I did not go to the school of the proletariat, it is the proletariat that came to my school. I have spent my life teaching it its rights.[24]

[21] Ibid., p. 31.

[22] Ibid., p. 48.

[23] René L'Hermitte, 'Staline et le problème allemand, mai 1941. Texte inédit en français', *Communisme*, 1/1987, p. 52.

[24] SFIO National Council, 6 and 7 August 1916, reproduced in *Le Temps*, 7 August 1916.

Guesde reasoned like a strategist far behind the lines, without mentioning (or only very marginally so) the terrible human consequences of the conflict. Some have seen his intransigence as the result of his old age and his lack of understanding faced with a new situation. Joseph Cartier, a militant involved in the Committee for the Resumption of International Relations, hostile to the war—and before 1914, a Guesdist—claimed at a 2 March 1916 meeting of the SFIO's 17th Paris section that Guesde had 'gone gaga'.[25] Did his illnesses and his age explain all this? Already in 1899, as Guesde's political line became more rigid, some attributed his antidreyfusard and anti-ministerial positions to his personal problems. Doubtless, we cannot deny the aggravating role of these factors. But when we read and reread Guesde's interventions from 1905 onwards, and even those from his 1893 election campaign (not to forget the patriotic élan of 1870), this was not really such an about-turn. The Guesde who had been the old and trustworthy friend of the German social-democrats now seemed consigned to the past—and there was certainly a rupture, from this point of view. But any inconsistency between his pre- and post-1914 positions was much less a spectacular turnaround than the changing attitudes of Gustave Hervé and certain 'revolutionary' syndicalists, who had flipped from a dogged anti-patriotism to a harsh nationalism in just a few days. Guesde's conversion, or about-turn, was thus relative; it was above all a shock to those who read the resolutions passed by the International more than the propaganda texts with which Guesde had himself achieved election.

Guesdists … Against Guesde?

But what about his supporters? Was there a 'war Guesdism'? Many did follow Guesde in his unfailing support for national defence—such was the case of Bracke, Lucien Roland, Jean Lebas, Marcel Cachin, Albert Bedouce and Compère-Morel, who each approved of Guesde's presence in government, albeit sometimes with certain variations. Some of them occupied important positions in the Parti Socialiste: for instance, during the war Cachin became the SFIO's leading specialist in foreign affairs, more so than Jean Longuet, the main driving force in the minority current hostile to the war.[26] Following his teacher's line, Cachin made contacts with

[25] AN F7/13074, police report.

[26] Gilles Candar, 'Les guesdistes et l'Union sacrée', *Cahier et revue de l'OURS*, May–June 1992, p. 18.

pro-war members of the British Labour Party as well as Destrée in Belgium. He took a close interest in developments in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while also posing the question of the future freedom of certain colonies (though not, decisively, those under British rule). He also met with pro-interventionist Italian socialists, including a certain Benito Mussolini. Guesde also met this latter, aiding the leading Italian socialist's bid to draw his country into the war and even helping him get funding for his propaganda. He thus took part in the efforts to encourage Italy into the war. These dealings earned Guesde an emphatic tribute from the Italian leader, who was beginning to outline his 'national socialism' in a period in which he had begun calling himself an 'exasperated socialist'. Mussolini also used Guesde to back up his interventionist and pro-war position, favourably citing him even into 1917.[27]

Yet not all of Guesde's partisans in the SFIO shared this orientation. Indeed, the war broke the unity among the Guesdists, which, without doubt, had already been rather relative even before 1914. Thus Adrien Pressemane (a prominent figure among the Limoges socialist milieu), Paul Faure, Brizon and other militants loyal to Guesde committed to the pacifist minority.

These differences also owed to the context: the world war, which some had insisted would be a very brief affair, instead became ever more of a bloodbath. The hundreds of thousands of deaths revived the anti-militarism and hostility to war that had existed before 1914, even despite any need to defend France's borders. The internationalist idea had taken a beating from the Union sacrée. But now, it was gradually being reborn. Evidence of this came from the revolt that broke out in certain socialist federations: Haute-Vienne, long loyal to Guesde, now challenged its old teacher, as did the socialists in l'Isère and Dordogne. Others like the Fédération du Nord remained in agreement with the MP for Roubaix.

Old friendships and alliances were now broken. The minority socialists hostile to the war invoked the texts that had been issued by the International, here using the same vocabulary as Rakovsky. They prepared the coming political recomposition—a process which Guesde does not seem to have noticed or understood. In Eastern Europe, some social-democratic groups did persist in their anti-war stance, especially in Russia and Bulgaria. Yet such forces were often very much in the minority in any

[27] Benito Mussolini, 'Le socialisme national' (1917) in Œuvres et discours, vol. III, 1928, pp. 25–28.

given country. In their eyes, Jules Guesde had become one of the emblematic cases of a betrayed and disfigured socialism. The prestigious orator, the herald of the class struggle, had broken with the very thing that he had founded: the working-class party, independent of the bourgeoisie, which had adopted the first openly Marxist programme in world history. Harsher still would be the judgement on the man who had made such a turn: as evidence of this we need to look only at the forceful lines written by Leon Trotsky, an expert analyst of the international socialist movement. Expelled from France with Guesde's blessing in October 1916, Trotsky sent him a letter beautifully capturing the exasperation among those who opposed the war:

> I believe it my duty to tell you some thoughts that will probably be of no use to you but could at least be of use *against* you. … You thought, you hoped, that the French proletariat which, in this war without ideas and without a way out, is being bled white by the crime of the ruling classes, will bear silently and to the end this shameful pact drawn up between official socialism and its worst enemies. You were mistaken. An opposition has arisen. … Expelled by you, I leave France with a deep faith in our victory. I send, above your head, a fraternal greeting to the French proletariat, which is waking up to its great destinies. With you, against you, *vive la France socialiste*![28]

The war's opponents were getting organised. Important among the attempts to give structure to this opposition were two conferences held in Switzerland (in Zimmerwald in September 1915 and Kienthal in April 1916) which brought together delegates from various socialist organisations. Pierre Brizon, an MP for l'Allier, enjoyed a certain renown among the socialists as a Guesdist, following his participation in the *Encyclopédie Socialiste*. In June 1916 he was one of the first two MPs in the French parliament to refuse to vote for renewed war credits. Brizon, too, made his way to the anti-war conference in Kienthal.

Faced with these defections, Guesde remained inflexible: for him, any initiative that went against the pursuit of the war seemed suspect. Even upon the occasion of the Inter-Allied Conference of socialist and labour parties on 14 February 1915, which defended a moderate viewpoint, Guesde firmly insisted on his own support for the war effort. *L'Humanité* reproduced part of his intervention, emphasising that he himself was 'in

[28] Leon Trotsky, 'Lettre à Jules Guesde', 11 October 1916. Online at https://www.marxists.org/francais/trotsky/œuvres/1916/10/lt19161011.htm

great pain'. Guesde maintained more than ever before his line in favour of war until victory: as he put it, 'The duty that imposes itself on socialists … is to continue the struggle to the end, closing off all those ears that might open up to whispers of exhaustion or even pity'.

At a time when the MP for Roubaix was repeating his implacable case for the salvation of the *patrie*, many of his opponents evoked the spirit of Jaurès, and while the martyr for peace entered into legend, Guesde veered off into blind militarism. For the oppositionists, Guesdism now appeared as hypocritical old tat. For instance, in 1915 Alfred Rosmer—a syndicalist in the CGT who was among the war's first opponents—expressed his doubts over the Union sacrée and laid into Guesdism. Just recently Guesde's supporters had wanted to subordinate the CGT to the party, but now they went along with revanchist nationalism without batting an eyelid, thinking that they could unproblematically return to the class struggle once the conflict was over:

> Do we really believe that we can just go back to the old stance, from one day to the next? Simplistic Guesdism says so and doubtless believes it. But however sincerely one wanted this to be possible, it will not be.[29]

Another representative of the CGT was Alphonse Merrheim, from the union's metalworkers' federation. He was present at the Zimmerwald conference and at first Lenin placed great political hopes in him. Merrheim, too, emphasised the detestable role played by Guesde and by those close to him. This conflict had a long history: the CGT man had lived in Roubaix for twenty-three years and was thus well acquainted with the Guesdists and their practices, of which he was strongly critical. In 1916 he met with Inès Armand, who had been sent by Lenin to persuade Merrheim to draw closer to his own positions. The syndicalist debated the Bolsheviks's ideas with Armand, but drew a negative equivalence between them and Guesde's own positions:

> Merrheim told me that we were Guesdists … that we reasoned in the abstract, that we did not take account of circumstances, that in France the socialists did not want to hear any talk of splits etc. I replied that the Guesdists in the old sense were far from being all as bad as that, and that at the present moment it was precisely our tactic that was living and realistic.[30]

[29] Alfred Rosmer, 'Lettre aux abonnés de la Vie ouvrière', 1 November 1915.
[30] Cited by Victor Daline, art. cit. p. 247.

The French government persecuted these anti-war socialists, whom it considered 'deserters'. What was Guesde's attitude towards his comrades, here? He seems to have maintained a certain goodwill towards them, probably in order to avoid storing up trouble and thus help prepare for future reconciliation. In his exchanges with the CGT leader Alexandre Luquet—for most of the war in close contact with the government—Merrheim worried about the persecution he faced. In a telephonic conversation transcribed by Merrheim, Luquet apparently reassured him:

> I cannot tell you by telephone from whom I have this information. … I would not tell you if I was not sure. It is Guesde who has opposed the persecution and ultimately the government has let things be. … From the international point of view, your arrest would stir too strong an outcry.[31]

Similarly, according to the 7 August 1916 issue of *Le Temps*, at the 6–7 August national council of the SFIO a militant opposed to the continuation of the war had handed a pro-Zimmerwald pamphlet to Guesde, specifying that this was a 'socialist manifesto, but by your adversaries'. Guesde supposedly responded that he 'had no adversaries' as far as socialists were concerned.[32]

Faced with Loriot—who defended the Zimmerwald conference's anti-war theses at the SFIO congress later in December 1915—'Guesde responded that the day after peace comes he will no longer be a minister'.[33] The minister Guesde thus distinguished himself by not hounding other socialists, even in a period in which many partisans of the Union sacrée wanted to exclude the 'Zimmerwaldians' en bloc. Was this a simple tactical move—in continuation with the government's own attitude in 1914 when it did not use 'carnet B' (a list of anti-militarists to be arrested in case of war), in its own bid to avoid pointless controversies? In Merrheim's case, was this a show of good will towards a *roubaisien* from his own 'petite patrie', no matter how opposed they had been over three decades?

[31] Cited by Victor Daline, 'Alphonse Merrheim et sa "correspondance confidentielle"', in Victor Daline, *Hommes et idées*, Moscou, Éditions du progrès, 1983, p. 332 (according to the Merrheim archives in the RGASPI, archive 217).

[32] SFIO National Council, 6 and 7 August 1916, reproduced in *Le Temps*, 7 August 1916.

[33] In the absence of written minutes police sources provide some insight, here APP Ba1535, 'Rapport Chamois', informant 7, cited in Julien Chuzeville, *Fernand Loriot. Le fondateur oublié du Parti communiste*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2012, p. 28.

For Guesde there was no doubt that, in the long term, it would be necessary to rebuild the unity among socialists after the conflict was over.

While Guesde remained attached to national defence, he gradually began to warn of the dangers it brought.[34] With the party in tatters, he quit the government in late 1916—a marker of the deep divisions among the socialists, faced with the war. While Albert Thomas sought to persist in his own efforts, despite Guesde's resignation, Sembat also expressed doubts on the socialists' cohesion in his *Cahiers noirs*. He was worried by the departure of the man who embodied working-class socialism. Without him, the Union sacrée had become largely obsolete: 'Without him, it's no longer the same thing. Thomas and I represent bourgeois socialism.'[35]

Even despite leaving the government, Guesde remained distrustful of peace initiatives. In 1917 the Stockholm Conference brought together socialists in the interest of putting an end to the war, but Guesde saw this as a '*boche* trap'. He refused to add his name to the manifesto that resulted from the conference, whereas Cachin and Bracke did endorse it. For his part, Compère-Morel pursued the line of close collaboration with the state, after having been critical of governmental participation back in 1915. He became the government's High Commissioner for Agriculture from January to July 1918 and again from January to May 1919. This post was less important than a ministry, but clearly did fit into the framework of governmental solidarity. There was, again, strong symbolism at work here—after all, this was the government of Georges Clemenceau, the old sworn enemy of the workers' movement.

Towards the Split: Lenin, Between Jaurès and Guesde

On 9 August 1916, Guesde's old friend in Bordeaux, Raymond Lavigne, observed that socialism was on the brink of a split. But his hope was precisely to shake off the burden represented by the Guesdist critics of the Union sacrée. As he put it, 'Even aside from the demagogy of our groups, I strongly believe that we have the general opinion as wind in our sails'. He prophesied:

[34] Alfred Rosmer, *Le mouvement ouvrier pendant la guerre*, Paris, Mouton, 1959, vol. 2, p. 207.

[35] Marcel Sembat, *Les cahiers noirs 1905–1922*, Paris, Viviane Hamy, 2007, p. 610.

> Is this not perhaps the right moment to let the split play out? Two parties (in each country) and two Internationals, with horror or love of the Germanic system as the deciding criterion—is this not the logical, if not necessary, future?[36]

The spirit of rupture had, without doubt, made headway. A few weeks before the end of the conflict, the October 1918 SFIO congress saw a change in the majority, as the old anti-war minority took over the party. Marcel Cachin succeeded Pierre Renaudel and took over the editorship of *l'Humanité*. Ageing and in pain, Guesde no longer played any formal role in congresses and such upheavals in the party majority. But he remained a moral authority among his older comrades. In 1919 he was re-elected an MP, on the basis of the new list system. The era of violent clashes, when the right-wing and far-right press had accused him of being a German accomplice, seemed to lie definitively in the past. The very right-wing *l'Éclair* paid him a fulsome tribute: 'Jules Guesde is a Frenchman and a Frenchman of good breed [*race*], who loathes the cosmopolitism of the demagogue allies of the plutocrats'.[37]

Amidst a wave of flag-waving jingoism—and a turn to the Right—that followed the Entente's victory, the *bleu horizon*[38] parliament welcomed the old master of historical socialism for his final spell as an MP. The last bill he proposed is worth noting, here: it aimed to 'establish the civil, political and economic equality of the two sexes'. Its second article stipulated that 'woman is granted the benefits of all the laws that hitherto applied to man alone'. Supported by many socialist MPs, it was, however, rejected by the majority in the Chamber. Guesde reaffirmed this old demand of the Parti Ouvrier for the last time—it having also been one of the very first measures he had championed in the public squares, to the great scandal of many republicans, in the late 1870s.

A few months later, as the German Revolution was still unfolding, Guesde confessed to Lucien Roland his satisfaction at seeing imperial Germany disappear, joyfully observing the proclamation of Republics across the whole European continent:

[36] IISG J. G., Letter from Raymond Lavigne to Jules Guesde, 9 August 1916.
[37] Émile Buré, 'Deux socialismes', *L'Éclair*, 19 November 1919.
[38] The greyish-blue colour of most French soldiers' uniforms during World War I.

> Far from proof against our doctrine, the war brings us new arguments. It has marked progress, for we have defeated German militarism. Republics are tending to become the form of government. Now, for untrammelled class struggles.[39]

Victory justified *a posteriori*—without apparent contradiction—the position which he had taken during the war. Had he not insisted at the SFIO congress in December 1915: 'We will resume relations with the German nation when it has got rid of the Kaiser'[40]—? Following Guesde's reasoning, history had thus proven him right, in a sense. The circle was complete: despite the horrors of the war, rallying to National Defence had achieved its goal of bringing down the German Reich. Guesde again adopted Engels's argument that a Republic was better than any other regime in allowing class contradictions to come out into the open. He also looked kindly upon the overthrow of Tsarism and the Russian Revolution of 1917—an event of which he, like many, had very little knowledge, at least in its early stages. Indeed, initially the proclamation of the Russian Republic filled Guesde with joy.

Yet when the Communist International was founded in March 1919—seeking a violent break with the 'bankrupt' Second International—Guesde rejected what he adjudged a *ukase* coming from Moscow. As the division of the socialist movement loomed, Guesde distanced himself from the young Soviet Republic, led by the Bolsheviks with an iron fist. During this same period, however, his old friend Cachin—soon dazzled by the 'great light in the East'—saw the future was Red. Cachin compared the audacity of the new German and Russian revolutionaries with that of his old teacher. For instance, in February 1919 he made a note in his *Carnets* referring to Kurt Eisner, representative of the ephemeral Bavarian Socialist Republic:

> The figure of an artist and, at the same time, an apostle, reminiscent of our own Jules Guesde, with whom he bears more than one intellectual and physical similarity. He is a powerful and spiritual speaker, a man of doctrine and sensitivity, generous and philosophical.[41]

What followed was the crushing of the revolutionary movements—with the approval of the SPD, for fear of Bolshevik contagion; but so, too, the

[39] Gilles Candar, 'Les dernières années de Jules Guesde', *Bulletin de la Société d'études jaurésiennes*, no. 123, 1991, p. 14.

[40] ANF7/12891. 'Les socialistes en 1915'.

[41] Marcel Cachin, *Carnets*, Paris, CNRS, 1993, vol. 2, p. 346.

foundation of the Communist International; and a powerful strike movement in France and many other countries. All this combined to worsen yet further the tensions within the Parti Socialiste. The future prospects of socialist unity would be decided at the SFIO's Tours Congress, held at the end of 1920. Returning from Soviet Russia, Marcel Cachin tabled with great conviction the motion in favour of embracing the conditions of Comintern membership. At first there were three possible solutions: either join the Communist International, rebuff it or else adopt a middle position of accepting membership on certain conditions, as proposed by Jean Longuet and Paul Faure.

Guesde above all dreaded a split. Soon before the congress began, in November 1920 the socialist press reproduced his letter to his old friend Delory, still now the mayor of Lille. Guesde called for the socialists to reject any split and reconstitute a single international, while de facto declaring himself hostile to the conditions proposed by Lenin's Soviet Russia. This letter had first been reprinted on the first page of *l'Humanité* on 14 October 1920. Reaffirming his Marxist moorings, Guesde called for the need for the 'political and economic expropriation of the capitalist class'. But on one condition—first it was necessary to rebuild working-class unity and resist the pro-split mood:

> There is but room for a single International … the duty—and the honour—of the French section would be immediately to call a preparatory conference, without distinguishing between the Russian Communist Party, the British Labour Party or the Belgian Workers' Party.

Finally, he opposed any foreign intervention against the Russian Revolution, 'which must alone decide its own present and its own future'. Guesde wanted to rebuild a kind of ecumenism in the workers' movement, preserving the unity that had been won in 1905. He did not seem to grasp the scale of the trauma caused by a war that had claimed millions of victims, nor to understand the political radicalisation that was taking place within the socialist parties. Many militants wanted to return to a form of doctrinal orthodoxy—for them, paradoxically, embodied by pre-war, historical Guesdism—as against the betrayal that had led to the disaster of 1914–1918.[42]

[42] Romain Ducoulombier, *Camarades! La naissance du Parti communiste en France*, Paris, Perrin, 2010.

Militants here invoked a past that was still very much part of their own present: and the shadow of the SFIO's founders would hang over the Tours Congress. Jaurès and Vaillant were no longer there, nor, of course, Lafargue. What would *they* have done? Would they have accepted the Bolsheviks's conditions? Guesde was the last 'great' from 1905 still to be alive. But, in pain and suffering, he did not attend the famous congress. He nonetheless followed the clashes from one day to the next: Bracke informed him of how the main plays were unfolding, in a series of very detailed letters.

Reading the transcripts of the interventions at Tours, we find that Guesde's voice still carried a certain weight, even if it was no longer actually heard. And even though Guesde did not attend the debates, historical and political legitimacy often relied on his name. Jaurès, the martyr for peace, was, without doubt, invoked a number of times. But while in the transcripts we find thirty-two mentions of Jaurès, there were also twenty-five references to Guesde.[43] The Roubaix MP still occupied a place in militants' minds, and on not a few occasions he was associated with Jaurès, the alliance between the two symbolising the doctrinal and political unity of French socialism.

For many, Jaurès and Guesde were still two sides of one same coin. The highly Jaurèsian Léon Blum had no hesitation in invoking both men, as well as the 'third man' Vaillant, the better to condemn attitudes which he considered contrary to socialism's spirit of unity:

> the revolutionary conception which I have just mentioned to you and which was [the conception] of Jaurès, of Vaillant, of Guesde, has always had to defend itself against two opposed deviations. It has always beat its path, with difficulty, between a right-wing deviation and a left-wing deviation.[44]

As Léon Blum sought to justify his rejection of joining the Communist International, he repeatedly invoked the refusal of Guesde, together with other guardian-figures of French socialism, to set partial reforms in counterposition to revolutionary perspectives. Most importantly, Guesde's friends had a major presence among the figures who intervened most at the congress—indeed, both Bracke and Cachin were among the most cited. Cachin dwelled at length on his loyalty to Guesde, albeit in the name of justifying a position that his teacher himself rejected:

[43] *Le congrès de Tours*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 1980, pp. 898–899.
[44] Ibid., p. 422.

> Whatever or present differences may be, I for my part will never forget the respect, the admiration, the enthusiasm—as if he were my father figure—with which I have all my life garlanded the pure and great conscience of Jules Guesde. … He has never ceased reminding the working class that it is dealing with a merciless enemy and that it, too, following its oppressors' own example, must at a given moment combine its forces to mount the revolutionary assault against the regime. … I would dare say that this flame is still within us and, since we are talking about tradition, this flame is, indeed, today our own.[45]

Cachin's lyrical evocation counterposed today's Guesde, who had become a minister defending the bourgeois state, to the glorious Guesde of yesteryear. This earned him a sharp exchange with Bracke—for while this latter championed the opposite position, they were fighting over one same legacy. For his part, Paul Faure made repeated reference to the unity advocated by Jaurès, Vaillant and Guesde. Lastly, the letter by German militant Clara Zetkin, sent to Tours by the Comintern in a bid to swing the majority to its own side, commemorated the glorious days of the joint battles waged alongside Guesde against Millerand and reformism.[46] There was not a word on Guesde who had joined the government in 1914, which it preferred to forget. While the congress delegates were mostly young or even very young, old rivalries and friendships were also at work, here. Indeed, Guesde had been a regular acquaintance of Zetkin and her husband in the Paris of the 1880s. But now they were separated for good by the war and the Bolshevik Revolution.

Guesde's name was frequently mentioned by delegates. These references were, however, rather strange: a first-time reader of the congress texts uninformed of the context might well be left with the impression that Guesde was already resting in peace alongside Jaurès and that the delegates were fighting over the names of two great teachers who had long since passed away. … It was, in a sense, as if Guesde would never again himself return to approve or contradict what was being said in his name.

In Guesde's personal papers we do find some comments on all this. He insisted 'I would never "sign up" to "theses" which, in so far as they have something *socialist* and *revolutionary* to them, have always been my own, Lenin and Trotsky having "imported" nothing that does not, knowingly or otherwise, demolish them and make them so many weapons in the

[45] Ibid. pp. 368–9.
[46] Ibid. p. 470.

enemy's hands'.[47] Yet going against this reading, at the end of the congress the majority of delegates did accept falling in line with the Comintern's conditions. Many probably did not share their rigid assumptions, but the disgust for 'war socialism' and the enthusiasm for a revived revolutionary model situating itself in continuity with 1793 and 1871 ultimately brought a decisive shift in the history of the French left. The split had arrived: henceforth, the socialists (SFIO) and the communists (SFIC) irreparably constituted two opposed branches of the workers' movement.

This was a fresh setback for Guesde. The old prophet had powerfully contributed to the unity patiently constructed between 1890 and 1905—news of the split supposedly left him 'dead of a broken heart'.[48] If we believe his last words, confided to Compère-Morel, Guesde would have preferred to have died before these baleful events in Tours: as he purportedly put it, 'I am headed toward death. I know it. I feel it. … But I regret dying so late. I ought to have passed two or three years ago, before witnessing this cruel, infernal spectacle of a proletariat divided against itself.'[49]

Guesde's reputation after his death would remain strongly marked by his choice at Tours. Léo Guesde said of his father in 1959 that

> It is because of his refusal to sign up to the Third International directed and imposed by Lenin that my father was immediately considered—as he still is—a wishy-washy Marxism badly informed and badly equipped in Marx's doctrine. If my father had done like the others did, which is to say, if he had accepted Lenin's laws, no one would have thought of classing my father among the bad Marxists.[50]

This was an entrenched position, a judgement from within Guesde's family itself—but it did, without doubt, contain some element of truth. Yet Guesde's legacy did not disappear, and indeed it cut across the divided left. At Tours there had been two opposed conceptions: on the one hand there was a Marxism combined with various other sensibilities, mixing patriotism and republicanism *à la française*, and on the other a Marxism which made no concessions—a 'Bolshevised' Marxism, in a sense of a radicalisation of

[47] IISG J. G. Manuscript, 'Note sur les thèses de la IIIe Internationale', 28 December 1920.

[48] Dominique Schneidre, *Fortune de mère*, Paris, Fayard, 2001, p. 69.

[49] Adéodat Compère-Morel, *Jules Guesde, le socialisme fait homme 1845–1922*, Paris, Aristide Quillet, 1937, p. 496.

[50] Letter from Léo Guesde to Joseph Genuzio, October 1959, cited in Joseph Genuzio, *Jules Guesde et Émile Zola, ou Le socialisme dans l'œuvre d'Émile Zola*, Bari, Levante, 1964, p. 33.

the hierarchical model of German social democracy. Guesde belonged historically to both and, indeed, made up part of their genealogy: in this lies the importance of his historical role, whatever one's appreciation of him. But in the context of what appeared as a serious debacle, Guesde could hardly be satisfied with the legacy he bequeathed to the divided forces of the French left—even if his imprint was itself profound.

The End

Depressed and increasingly ill, Guesde did still occasionally resurface, publishing a handful of articles. At the 1921 elections he pursued his goal of unity, through his desire that the SFIO should not stand candidates against certain Communists such as Fernand Loriot and Boris Souvarine. On 31 October that same year, he was again absent from the first congress of the refounded Parti Socialiste, as his party sought to rebuild. But the delegates addressed him a stirring letter of homage:

> The undersigned delegates to the First Congress that French socialism has held since the harmful split at Tours, regretting that your state of health denies us your presence and your precious advice, address you an homage with their fraternal sympathies, out of profound gratitude for the work of propaganda and recruitment that you have achieved for over half a century.[51]

The handwritten text was signed by hand, indeed by a very large number of delegates, including Léon Osmin, Léon Blum, Bracke and Marx Dormoy, among many others. In May 1922, Guesde again received a mandate for the congress which was to be held in Paris in June. But his condition was deteriorating. In June, afflicted by a serious boil, he left his home on the Rue Singer to head for the Saint-Mandé clinic. Needing surgery, this old veteran of the socialist movement did not survive his last operation. He died at the age of seventy-six on 28 July 1922. Three of his most loyal friends and comrades were to be the executors of his will. He mentioned them in a will in which he reaffirmed his unshakeable attachment to the socialist cause:

> In full agreement with my children … I bequeath to my friends Bracke—MP for the Seine—Édouard Fortin and Charles Bonnier, my socialist *oeuvre* (newspapers included), which they will use as best possible in our common

[51] Cited by Dominique Schneidre, op. cit., p. 130.

> propaganda, with the power to pass it on to the party when this latter—again having become what we have known and practiced—will be what it ought never to have stopped being: socialism in action.

Two days later, Guesde was buried in Paris's Père-Lachaise cemetery, not far from the communards whose political audacity he had so exalted fifty years earlier.

The political world—especially the socialists but also the communists—paid him tribute. For *l'Humanité*, now the central organ of the Section Française de l'Internationale Communiste (soon becoming the Parti Communiste Français) 'the news will be received with grief among the international working class'. Saluting the revolutionary and anti-reformist Guesde on its front page, the biography stopped in 1914, with the Union sacrée, a period summarised in just two lines: 'We know what became of the old battler. This was not the least of our sorrows in these four woeful years.' As an irony of history, it was his loyal comrade Marcel Cachin who wrote this homage, so sparing in its references to the war—and indeed, Cachin like Guesde had enthusiastically rallied to the Union sacrée in 1914. The leadership committee of the young SFIC warmly and unambiguously paid tribute to Guesde's legacy: 'The Communist Party, which knows what it owes to the doctrinal training of its militants thanks to the work and the efforts of Guesde, considers his death a bereavement for the proletariat'. Despite the recent breaking of ties, the Roubaix MP's emblematic figure was instantly integrated into the Communist Pantheon. The following day, *l'Humanité* laid claim to both the branches of historical socialism that had united in 1905, associating them with present-day demands: 'For Jaurès and Guesde, against the war, for amnesty!'[52] Portraits eulogising Guesde and Jaurès accompanied several articles demanding the immediate release of political prisoners, notably the sailors who had mutinied in the Black Sea, including the emblematic figure of André Marty. On 31 July, *l'Humanité* reproduced Cachin's funeral speech. Noting with sadness the passing of both Lafargue and Guesde, Cachin emphasised: 'We no longer have among us any of the original, vigorous exponents of the Marxist doctrine. And if, today, we wanted to find doctrinaires of their level, we would have to go looking for them in Russia.' Two elements of Guesde's career particularly drew attention, here: firstly, the fact that he had founded the first workers' party, and then his example in showing the

[52] *L'Humanité*, 30 July 1922.

'need to do battle' through vigorous and intensive propaganda. The communists would pursue Guesde's original work. Cachin saluted Guesde one last time:

> It is my greatest pain that eventually I have had to separate myself from you. But my conscience gives me reassurance. It tells me that I have remained loyal to the revolutionary ideal which I received from you in my youth, let me say it here, with a filial enthusiasm.

More expected was the socialist *vieille maison*'s homage to Guesde, who had explicitly stuck by the SFIO, against the advice of his old friend Cachin, but in accordance with the ever-loyal Bracke. Indeed, on the day of the funeral, Jean Longuet saluted this 'great forerunner' in *Le Populaire*. Longuet evoked Guesde's multiple talents and notably the one put on display in his critique of the 'bourgeois order, which he pursued with such fine hatred, a generous and creative hatred of social iniquities, [a hatred] which Jaurès himself fêted'. Marcel Sembat also paid a stirring tribute to Guesde, a man who had been his fierce adversary in the pre-1914 socialist milieu but stood side-by-side with him in defending France in wartime. For his part, Paul Faure published a telling obituary in *Le Populaire* under the title 'The Death of the Apostle':

> He has joined Lafargue, Jaurès and Vaillant, and here we are, deprived of the last of our illustrious leaders who, with his robust arms founded the Parti Socialiste to which we have remained faithful, body and soul, against winds and tides.[53]

There was no trace of any criticism of Guesde, who was here held to have remained lucid to the end, even despite his illness, especially on the nature of the Bolshevik Revolution. Faure continued 'He followed, saddened, certain revolutionary experiences contrary to Marxist teachings, of which he was throughout his life the most prestigious populariser'.

Guesde's adversaries also paid more measured, but nonetheless real tributes. The front page of *Le Figaro* announced 'The death of Mr. Jules Guesde'. 'A life not without grandeur', it commented, while also saluting the firmness of his convictions, in brief but clear terms: 'He was a great, honest man whose adversaries have paid him homage. An intransigent

[53] *Le Populaire*, 30 July 1922.

doctrinaire, he never wanted to give up anything of that which he believed just and good.'[54]

A persecuted and jailed undesirable in the early years of the Third Republic, in 1914 Guesde had contributed to the state at the highest level, in helping it consolidate the national defences. Beyond socialist ranks, France had lost one of the most original politicians of his era, leaving his mark on the early decades of the longest-lasting Republic in France's history.

[54] *Le Figaro*, 30 July 1922.

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CHAPTER 7

‘Eternal Guesdism’: The Prophet’s Legacies

A year on from Guesde’s death, his old and loyal friend Alexandre Zévaès drew an unambiguous assessment: ‘The Guesdism which represented the solidest school of socialist thought in France from 1878 to 1904 and in this same period constituted the most numerous and disciplined segment of French socialism under the name of the “Parti Ouvrier Français”, has definitively died together with Jules Guesde’.[1]

So, would Guesdism not bequeath any legacy? Forty years later Arthur Ramette, a leader of the Parti Communiste Français and MP for Le Nord from 1962 to 1973, offered a more nuanced point of view: ‘Without doubt, Guesde profoundly marked political activity in the north of France and left deep traces there, even if they are not always apparent’.[2]

Was this, then, mainly a regional legacy—indeed, one little visible, upon first glance? This local aspect would alone be worthy of interest, considering the powerful Socialist and Communist implantation in the working-class Nord. But his legacy should not just be seen within these limited terms. After all, at least up till the 1980s anyone interested in the history of the international workers’ movement around the world knew the name of Jules Guesde, the illustrious founder of the first working-class

Jacques Julliard, ‘L’éternel guesdisme’, Critique, November 1966.

[1] Alexandre Zévaès, *Histoire du Parti socialiste de 1904 à 1923*, Paris, Librairie Marcel Rivière, 1912, p. 215.

[2] Arthur Ramette, ‘L’héritage de Guesde …’, *Démocratie nouvelle*, March 1966, p. 23.

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J.-N. Ducange, *Jules Guesde*, Marx, Engels, and Marxisms,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-34610-2_7

party. If we want to understand this enduring influence, we need to cast off a reading that has become widespread since the 1970s. For in vilifying Guesde and his supporters, this interpretation has led Guesde to be gradually overlooked and then almost disappear from the memory of the Left.

Even long after his death, the MP for Roubaix inspired fondness among many socialists and communists. Here, too, Georges Sorel can be a valuable resource for understanding Guesde's long-term appeal. Referring to the Russian Revolution in one 1918 letter, Sorel emphasised:

> The Bolsheviks' fall will come amidst pools of blood, which will revive the idea of class struggle—an idea which is always threatened with dying out (and in our country it notably so little conforms to our tradition that it took the terrible repression of 1871 to allow Guesde to introduce it here).[3]

Guesde embodied not only the Parti Ouvrier but the introduction of the class struggle into the French political terrain. Given how many militants would go on to consider the class struggle a reality—in history as in the political field—Guesde would remain an irreplaceable forerunner, if one who also remained open to criticism.

Respecting a Pioneer: Guesde and the Early Communists

In the years following Guesde's death, the now-Communist *l'Humanité* regularly published personal accounts by old friends of Guesde's. For instance, in early 1923 we can find in its pages an extract from the memoirs of Christian Rakovsky—by now the leading Soviet commissar in Ukraine—on 'Jules Guesde and communism'.[4] This was an abbreviated version of a longer contribution initially intended for the *Comintern* journal, written at Lenin's request. Rakovsky's great respect for the man who had introduced Marxism to France was evident—and Guesde's place in Communist memory seemed confirmed. Already on the path of 'Bolshevisation', the PCF posed itself above all as a party of the class struggle; as he invoked this line, Marcel Cachin regularly made emphatic

[3] '"Cher camarade" Sorel à Lanzillo, 1909–1921', *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Micheletti*, 1993–1994, p. 252.

[4] Christian Rakovsky, 'Jules Guesde et le communisme', L'Humanité, 3 January 1923.

tributes to his own teacher. The daily's founder, Jaurès, was at this point relatively eclipsed in favour of Guesde.

Did this mean setting Guesde against Jaurès? A pamphlet issued by a Communist publisher in Le Nord well symbolised this period. It reproduced two speeches given in Lille a quarter-century apart: one by Cachin in 1926, and another by Guesde in 1900 responding to Jaurès (the famous exchange on the *Deux méthodes*). The preface emphasised the incontestable historical and political continuity between the two interventions. 'Here collected in the same pamphlet, the speech that Marcel Cachin gave in the Lille Hippodrome on 25 June 1926 and, from 1900, Jules Guesde's crushing reply to the reformist approach then supported by Jean Jaurès.'[5]

Cachin began his talk by addressing the old militants who had witnessed the Guesde-Jaurès clash twenty-six years earlier: 'This hall still echoes with the thunderous applause that greeted our revolutionary Guesde's crushing response to the reformist Jaurès'.[6] He particularly targeted the socialists who had stayed in the SFIO, whom he called on to leave their party to join the ranks of the PCF. In making such a move, they would be restoring ties with Guesde's original spirit. Cachin presented himself as the rightful heir to the 1904 Amsterdam Resolution in opposition to participation in government—a motion defended by Guesde—and Jaurès.[7] However, discretion was in order when it came to the MP's post-1914 biography.

A few years later, in 1932—upon the tenth anniversary of this founding father's death—the Guesdist legacy was at the heart of multiple pieces published in the Communist press. The PCF's 'class against class' strategy now implied a refusal to make any concessions to social-democrats. The tone regarding Guesde changed, indeed harshened, even if the overall appreciation remained largely the same. Jean Fréville, close to the new general secretary Maurice Thorez, concluded one article in *l'Humanité* calling for the 'non-Marxist hangovers of Guesdism' to be expunged from the party, having recalled both the 'leftist errors' and 'rightist errors' of this current.[8] This stereotyping language implied a systematic process of

[5] *Deux discours à l'Hippodrome lillois (Marcel Cachin Juin 1926 et Jules Guesde Novembre 1900)*, Lille, Éditions lilloises, 1926, p. 7.

[6] Ibid., p. 12.

[7] See Chapter Four, p. 108.

[8] Jean Fréville, 'Un anniversaire—Jules Guesde (1845–1922)', *L'Humanité,* 28 July 1932. Also note André Ferrat's piece on the same theme in the *Cahiers du communisme*, again in 1932.

cutting off the good elements from the bad. The Communist militant struck a different note with reference to the 1880s and 1890s: 'Guesde's intransigence in this period of struggle against reformism remains a model from which we should draw inspiration'. In the backdrop, here, there were clear attacks on the socialists. The founder of the Parti Ouvrier nonetheless remained a forerunner, precisely and above all because he had founded this first party: 'Guesde the battler, Guesde the spokesman of the masses, Guesde the initiator of Marxism in France, despite his faults belongs to us, to us alone'—and thus certainly not to the socialists. The highly 'class-struggle' vocabulary of the earlier Guesde took pride of place, here. At the same time, the PCF revived the original Guesdist reading of the French Revolution: in the writings of Paul Vaillant-Couturier, the spotlight was on 14 July, *La Marseillaise* and the bourgeois Republic. Each year up till 1934, in the pages of *l'Humanité* he called on readers not to mark this 'bourgeois celebration'! Here we are as if re-reading the short text Guesde had published on the French Revolution in 1883 and then repeatedly rehashed in many subsequent pieces.

So, Guesdism did belong to the past. Tellingly, there were sporadic references to this tradition in the debates coursing throughout the party's various currents. Many critical communists looked unfavourably on the PCF leaders' new orientation, which seemed like playing Guesde's sectarian hymnsheets all over again. Charles Rappoport, a former partner of Guesde's who had passed to the Communist camp in 1920, stood up in opposition to the 'class against class' tactic. What he saw as its deadly politics of 'neither-nor' reminded him of the most rigid period of French Marxism. In a 30 January 1928 letter to the PCF central committee he opposed the new party line and denounced the old reflexes:

> *La tactique du maintien* [refusing to stand down in Socialists' favour in electoral run-offs] is a return to Lassallean opportunism and the false theory of a single reactionary mass … this tactic is also the return to primitive Guesdism, which was one of the causes of the Guesdist degeneration into reformism in the North and into reactionary demagogy in Paris.[9]

[9] FMSH Paris, Voegein-Rappoport collection, cited in Charles Rappoport, *Une vie révolutionnaire: 1883–1940, les mémoires de Charles Rappoport*, Paris, Éditions de la MSH, 1991, p. 221.

Respect for the 'Old Man' Among the Socialists

To have died on 28 July 1922 was, in a sense, 'fortunate' for Guesde. Indeed, at his funeral, comments associating the two SFIO co-founders were much in order, not least given the closeness between their death dates (the anniversary of Jaurès's death fell on 31 July). Thus, on 28 July 1923 Jaurès and Guesde were put on a wholly equal footing, each being evoked in the SFIO daily *Le Populaire* by numerous socialists close to them.

Paul Faure, a die-hard historic Guesdist, played a major role as a man of the party machine between 1920 and 1940. As such, this 'mastermind of the reconstruction of [French] socialism'[10] embodied a direct form of continuity with the Guesde of before 1914. Discipline and organisational work doubtless constituted an important legacy of the Guesdist current: Faure, the 'heart of the party' as Louis Lévy put it,[11] built a line of descent from it. Did Léon Blum, historically close to Jaurès, occupy such a 'continuator' role following on from *l'Humanité*'s founder? A certain common sensibility as humanist, dreyfusard intellectuals does facilitate comparisons between the two men. But it seems difficult to detect or, indeed, replay the opposition between Guesde and Jaurès as an opposition between Paul Faure and Léon Blum, as if acting as their respective heirs. Doubtless, over the years to come the SFIO would republish various Guesde's pamphlets, including his debate with Jaurès, *Les deux méthodes*. Nonetheless, all socialist leaders lay claim to the inheritance of both men—officially, at least—and doctrinal contrasts now had nothing of the same force. Rather, Blum was more the man who represented the party to the outside world (in *Le Populaire* and as an MP) whereas Faure was the man of organisation and the party machine. This did, doubtless, recall certain pre-1914 configurations, but the comparison stopped there and the fundamental divergences were not so clear. In short, we can detect some forms of continuity in the Blum-Faure pairing. Yet despite the undeniable legacies from the past there are no strict parallels to be drawn. As in the case of the PCF, an earlier period had left some traces, but they also crisscrossed with the specific logics that resulted from a new political situation.

Among the SFIO figures long close to Guesde and active since the old teacher's death, Bracke occupied a place apart. He embodied the

[10] Bernard Dougnac, *Paul Faure, biographie (1878–1960)*, PhD thesis at Bordeaux III, October 2006, p. 187.

[11] Louis Lévy, *Vieilles histoires socialistes*, Paris, Bruno Leprince, 2003.

'impenitent Guesdist, a pure one'.[12] First an MP for Paris from 1912 to 1924, he then went back to his youthful home to become elected MP for Le Nord from 1928 onwards. He also played an important role in the Socialist International.[13] Beyond his activities as a politician, Bracke's name was also familiar to interwar readers of Marx. He was one of the initiators of the Costes/Molitor edition of his works—a first systematic endeavour to translate and publish Marx's texts in French, independent of the SFIO apparatus yet remaining within its networks. Taken together this was a sometimes rather haphazard effort, with some texts cut or poorly translated. But this was nonetheless pioneering at a time when the French Communists had not yet judged any such project opportune or useful and instead largely concentrated on propaganda and pamphlets.[14] Bracke also translated texts by historically important figures of German social democracy like Rosa Luxemburg and regularly republished texts by Guesde. Through his publishing work Bracke provided a certain continuity with Guesdism, concerned as he was—with the limitations we have mentioned—with the introduction of Marxism to France. This was perhaps even a small act of revenge, probably stimulated by the competition from a Communist Party which claimed to be Marx's only legitimate heir. The Guesdists had long been criticised for not having done any serious work in translating Marx's texts, before 1914: now, partially at least, this had been achieved.

Yet Bracke's legitimacy owed to far more than this publishing work alone. In the shadows, he also had a front-row seat alongside many other leading socialists including a certain Guy Mollet—at this time federation secretary of the Pas-de-Calais Socialist youth and the driving force behind a socialist study group in Arras. Mollet himself wrote no significant text on Guesde during this period; but he did associate his memory with that of Jaurès. For instance, in the 22 February 1930 *Le Populaire* he published an account of a meeting of militants in his SFIO branch. There he spoke of the 'recounting of the death of Jaurès' which 'produced great emotion' but also the reading of 'two pages by Guesde and Jaurès [which] were, among others, particularly appreciated'.

[12] Denis Lefebvre, *Guy Mollet le mail aimé*, Paris, Plon, 1992, p. 36.

[13] As he remained until 1936. In 1928 the ardent Zévaès had published a first biography full of flattery. Taking little critical distance, it did have the merit of being based on contemporary first-person accounts and some archival documents.

[14] Jean-Numa Ducange, Julien Hage, Jean-Yves Mollier (eds.), *Le Parti Communiste Français et le livre*, Paris, EUD, 2014.

If Bracke provided a line of intellectual and political descent at the national or even international level, it was locally that Guesde was most venerated. Indeed, he took up a particularly important place in the memory of *roubaisiens*. Roubaix's Socialist Deputy Mayor Jean Lebas—an old ally of Guesde's and his successor as an MP for Le Nord—organised commemorations of this popular tribune together with local socialists. The mayor's office began a public subscription for a monument by selling postcards with his image. Barely three years after his death, on 12 April 1925 the town of Roubaix unveiled the statue in memory of 'citizen Jules Guesde'. The sculptor was none other than Georgette Agutte, who was also Marcel Sembat's wife. In one leaflet, Lebas underlined how important this event truly was: 'The workers will display all the esteem and gratitude they preserve in their hearts for the memory of the venerated propagandist Jules Guesde'.[15] A 'Cantata to Jules Guesde' was performed at the inauguration, with the participation of over 200 singers and musicians. In tribute to one of his personal passions, several poems were written, glorifying Guesde without reservations—and with a few doses of flattery:

> For a half-century/Indefatigably/Guesde, you educated the crowds/And the serfs of the factory and the paupers of the land/Grasping your advice put it to good use/And soon there rose up whole phalanxes/Of soldiers, ready and ripe for the Revolution.

In his speech at the inauguration of the statue, Lebas passed Guesde's life in review, underlining the aspects one would have expected: he referred to his role as founder of the first socialist daily, of the first workers' party and so on. According to the local socialist press, 30,000 people gathered to honour the 'great tribune'.[16] Many socialist and trade-union representatives from around the region made the journey in order to be there. We can also note the presence of many members of the International as well as the CGT leader Léon Jouhaux, all of whom gave speeches in his honour. A few years later, in September 1933, a 'Jules Guesde' school was inaugurated: the local branch of the Parti Socialiste called on its members to attend in order to 'honour the memory of the Great Tribune of the

[15] AM Roubaix, 'Inauguration du monument Jules Guesde, 1925'.
[16] AM Roubaix, 'Inauguration du groupe scolaire Jules Guesde, 3 September 1933.

Proletariat, of the Apostle of Socialism'.[17] In these years, city hall worked ardently to uphold the memory of its first socialist MP.

The year 1933 was also the year in which 'Friends of Jules Guesde' society was founded, this time at the national level. This, too, was a socialist initiative: the main driving force was Léon Osmin, secretary of the Seine Federation SFIO and himself an old ally of Guesde's. In *La Bataille Socialiste* Paul Faure presented the aims of this association, which sought to honour his struggles:

> Everything in the world shouts and cries that Guesde was right—right to the point of opening the eyes of the blindest and making the deafest hear. To have attempted and to have succeeded in making the mass of militants understand, to have armed the workers for their class fight, to have wanted doctrine to leave the narrow circles of the initiated to put it into life and action—all this is something very great, moving and fertile, now that it has been demonstrated more than enough that the fate of the working class and of civilisation depend on the triumph of this doctrine.[18]

Obviously, the main aim of this Jules Guesde Society was to uphold the militant memory of the great leader. But it also expressed—doubtless still timidly—the will to create a group that could spur research on the different dimensions of socialism. At the first meeting in 1933 there were socialists who had been allies of Guesde's but also front-rank figures like Léon Blum.[19] This society seems to have survived until 1935 (the year of Osmin's death). It was the only attempt of this kind, whereas Jaurès would be the subject of a much more enduring hero-worship.

1936: Guesde, Jaurès and the Popular Front

Did this 'sectarian' disappear in 1935–1936, at a moment of unity among the forces of the Left? In fact, this was not at all the case, especially given that the rapprochement of 1935 came upon the thirty-year anniversary of the 1905 entente between Guesde and Jaurès. Tellingly, an introductory pamphlet for the Parti Socialiste published in 1936 paired Jaurès and

[17] Paul Faure, 'Les Amis de Jules Guesde', *Bataille Socialiste*, August–September 1932, pp. 1–2.

[18] Léon Osmin archives, OURS.

[19] Secrétariat général du Parti socialiste (SFIO), *Le Parti socialiste: ses principes, son organisation, son action*, Paris, Librairie Populaire, 1936.

Guesde as men representing two complementary sensibilities who had allowed the formation of socialist identity and the party itself. In the list of 'socialist books recommended to new party members', Léon Blum's writing unsurprisingly appeared right at the top. But Guesde and Lafargue also featured prominently in this list, considering that the first Jaurès texts mentioned were accompanied by the interventions of those he was debating (i.e. in *Les deux méthodes* and *Idéalisme et conception matérialiste de l'histoire*, respectively). The only Jaurès text mentioned in isolation was his *Discours à la jeunesse*, but it was relegated to the very bottom of the bibliography; meanwhile Guesde, Marx, Engels and historic Guesdists like Compère-Morel and Paul Faure were recommended before Jaurès's own texts.

In late July 1936, at the end of the Popular Front's first phase (the formation of the government and the massive strikes across France in May–June 1936) the SFIO announced the commemoration of just one of the two men's deaths—the anniversary of Jean Jaurès's assassination. But the account of the rally made the front page of *Le Populaire* on 1 August 1936 with the title 'Grandiose Commemorations of Jaurès and Guesde at the Vélodrome d'Hiver'. That same day, the Communists' *l'Humanité* relegated this same commemoration to its second page and the title of the piece mentioned Jaurès alone. But the article did also make more discreet references to Guesde, indeed in positive terms.

Beyond the contents of the commemorative texts, we should not forget that former Guesde allies occupied positions of considerable importance in this period. When Léon Blum became prime minister at the head of the first socialist government in France's history, it was Bracke who replaced him at the head of *Le Populaire*. In this same period Marcel Cachin was still editor of *l'Humanité*. … At the moment of left unity, two old Guesdists were lead editors of the two great workers' parties' dailies. And in many Popular Front rallies—in a period when large portraits of socialist leaders were still often placed on the stage—Guesde took pride of place. Orators recalled how Guesde and Jaurès had been men of unity in 1905, notwithstanding the gulf between them.

Ever since the 1920s, the more selective element of activists' memory had been working at full tilt; whereas in 1928 some took him as the forerunner of the 'class against class' line—recalling the Guesde of 1899—the Popular Front for its part revived the pro-unity Guesde of 1905, or even the minister in 1914, on the socialist side. With hindsight, such selective choices may well raise a smile. But historically, this had the consequence of

inscribing Guesde in the collective imaginary of the Left, indeed in the long term. There is no doubt that many militants of all tendencies knew the main outlines of Guesde's career (there were regular biographical reminders in both local and national papers) and that he was attributed a major role in the origins of both the Socialist and Communist parties.

We can find other telling tributes from this same phase. In 1937 Karl-Jean Longuet—the nephew of Edgar Longuet, of Guesdist sensibility—sculpted a monumental bust of Guesde, chosen for the CGT pavilion at the Exposition Internationale.[20] Guesde was thus portrayed alongside five other 'emancipators of the people': Marx, Proudhon, Varlin, Pelloutier and Jaurès. This was but further proof that Guesde still represented a great name in the workers' movement, a symbol well-known and respected even in the trade unions. The year 1937 was also the year of publication of Compère-Morel's biography *Jules Guesde. Le socialisme fait homme.* Often hagiographical—but well-documented—it for many decades remained the only real biography available.

Seen from Elsewhere: Early Research

If it is more difficult to judge Guesde's reputation abroad, a few examples do nonetheless show that he did not escape attention. Echoing the PCF's appreciation of Guesde, the young USSR fêted him by regularly publishing his texts in the form of pamphlets. Moreover, the seminar run by the historian Nikolai Lukin—later eliminated in the Stalinist purges—involved several researchers who presented works on Guesde, though to our knowledge no study of any consequence was dedicated to him.

Looking beyond France also allows us to consider the first historical works devoted to Guesde, though these, too, remained strongly marked by the political context. One early—but little-known—academic work provides interesting analytical considerations for grasping the ambiguities and contradictions of Guesdism, namely Ernst H. Posse's *Marxism in France 1871–1905.* Published in German in Berlin in 1905, this volume was in large part devoted to a study of Guesdism from a doctrinal standpoint.[21] Its publication, at a moment of virulent clashes between social-democrats and communists in Germany, immediately followed Posse's defence of his

[20] Colette Chambelland and Danielle Tartakowsky, 'Le movement syndical à l'Exposition internationale de 1937', *Le Mouvement social*, no. 190, January–March 1999, pp. 69–83.

[21] Ernst H. Posse, *Der Marxismus in Frankreich 1871–1905*, Berlin, R.L. Prager, 1930.

thesis in late 1929. While the author remains difficult to identify, it is worth noting that this thesis was supervised by Professor Gustav Mayer, a historian of socialism at the University of Berlin—he had been appointed to this post in 1919 and was the only academic in Germany working on this subject at the time. In 1920 Mayer had published a noteworthy biography of Friedrich Engels. We know little about Posse except for the fact that he was one of the individuals who introduced Georges Sorel's works to Germany. Having become sensitised to Sorelian ideas, Posse was far from an apologist for Guesde. But already in the preface he stated why he considered it necessary to understand this history in all its complexity: namely, the fact that the SFIO leaders Blum and Paul Faure, much like the Communist Marcel Cachin, continued to invoke him. This was, of course, an enigma for a German well-versed in the history of Marxist debates, in a country where the likes of Kautsky, Bernstein and many others—unlike the French—had published impressive theoretical tomes. Neither denigrating nor celebrating the Guesdists, Posse justified his study on the basis that these latter had 'given the Parti Socialiste the spirit which animates it still in our own time'.[22] Often doctrinaire, Posse's contribution nonetheless marked a first turning point, in the sense of taking its distance from the living memory of politicians and other witnesses. It offers an interesting analysis, suggesting that despite distortions and errors Guesde and his partisans 'succeeded in assuring the victory [in 1905] of the basic principles of Marxism'[23]—and, for this very reason, they were worthy of study. In accord with his master Sorel, Posse reaffirmed that the Guesdists had been the first to introduce the idea of the class struggle in any solid manner, as against all 'inter-class' compromises.

Another point expounded in Posse's book was the originality of the position the Guesdists took up outside of the republican tradition: they 'were those who most held back from glorifying the tradition of the Great Revolution'.[24] Here, too, Sorel's influence—which, moreover, the author explicitly mentioned and openly invoked at several points—and his critique of the bourgeois politician clearly made itself felt. The logical outcome of this influence came when Posse critiqued the Guesdists' radical rejection of revolutionary syndicalism as well as their de facto increasingly reformist practice. But Posse retained a form of admiration for the early

[22] Ibid., p. 6.
[23] Ibid., p. 36.
[24] Ibid., p. 60.

Guesde, as the authentic representative of the idea of the class struggle. Karl Korsch, a dissident-communist theorist who would be little suspected of fondness for Guesde, did not miss this in his review of the book for Boris Souvarine's *La Critique sociale*. Here, Korsch emphasised how interesting Posse's study really was for understanding the specificities of French socialism and the manner in which 'Guesde's Marxist group accomplished among the most fruitful of education efforts and imprinted its Marxist pattern on the movement as a whole, in such a profound manner that it still exists even today'.[25]

Soon afterwards, in 1933 the American historian Samuel Bernstein published a history of French Marxism[26] and, most importantly, a long and well-informed 1940 article on Guesde and the introduction of Marxism in France, devoted to the early years between the 1870s and 1880s. It was published in the US Communist Party's theoretical review *Science and Society*. While underlining Guesde's 'schematic approach',[27] the author also foregrounded his talents as an orator and party leader. The American historian denounced his excessive simplifications of concepts from Marx, while also providing an accurate survey of the relations between Guesde and Marx and Engels, using the materials available at the time. The final part condemned all of Guesde's actions from 1914 onwards. This was in harmony with the communist vulgate, though Samuel Bernstein nonetheless used a more measured tone than that employed in directly political publications. The second period in Guesde's career was counterposed to the first, judged limited but nonetheless fruitful. If there was nothing very original about the article's conclusions, the critical use of documents constituted a first step towards a subtler comprehension of the many different aspects of Guesdism.

After the War: A Return to the POF?

Let's turn back to France. In 1945 the PCF became the country's biggest party and—more enduringly—the biggest party of the Left, a position it would maintain for over three decades. In the enthusiasm surrounding

[25] Karl Korsch, review of Ernst H. Posse, published in *La Critique sociale*, 1931, p. 37.

[26] Samuel Bernstein, *The Beginnings of Marxian socialism in France*, New York, Social Science Studies, 1933.

[27] Samuel Bernstein, 'Jules Guesde, Pioneer of Marxism', *Science & Society*, vol. 4, 1/1940., p. 42.

Liberation, there arose the—ephemeral—ambition to create a new 'Parti Ouvrier Français',[28] explicitly adopting the name of Jules Guesde's party, in the year of the centenary of his death. This was clearly a Communist initiative, proposing to 'take the lead in realising unity in action and in unity between the two parties, for the formation of a single Party of the workers and of the people of France'.[29] On 12 June 1945 *l'Humanité* published a proposed 'charter for the unity of the working class of France' intended to result in the creation of a Parti Ouvrier Français, presented as the heir to the best traditions of the workers' movement. But the Socialists bluntly rejected a project that looked like Communist manipulation. Nonetheless, an association called 'The Friends of the POF' did allow the PCF to expand its influence for a short period: thanks to this unity bid, based on the acronym so associated with Jules Guesde, a few socialists did draw towards Maurice Thorez's party.[30] Twenty years later, Jacques Duclos said that this name had not been chosen by chance: 'It was not that we much fancied this title itself, but its historical value did attract us to it, for the Parti Ouvrier Français was the first Marxist party in France'.[31] Justifying this initiative in *l'Humanité*, Marcel Cachin invoked the 1905 Congress at the Salle du Globe, which had seen Guesde and Jaurès unite, as they left behind their antagonisms. Why not draw inspiration from the spirit of 1905? Cachin did not go so far as to say that the Socialists were pursuing the work of Jaurès and the Communists stood in continuity with Guesde: prudence was in order, when it came to talking about *l'Humanité*'s own founder. Nonetheless, Guesde's place was strongly recognised, effectively so at least. At this same moment, Cachin forcefully reaffirmed his lineage in *La Pensée*, a review close to the PCF. In a more richly textured article he underlined the major role played by the Roubaix tribune, who had been able to unite the best cadres of the workers' movement around his own person. Guesde had 'understood the primary need for the constitution of a set of well-educated and disciplined cadres, in order to organise a strong workers' party armed with the right programme. He was able to group around himself a phalanx of selfless worker-pioneers of admirable

[28] Jean Duma, 'L'unité organique 1944–1946', *Cahiers d'histoire de l'Institut Maurice Thorez*, April–June 1974, pp. 68–82.

[29] Cited by ibid., p. 72.

[30] Jean Vigreux, "Le comité d'entente socialiste-communiste" dans Serge Berstein, Frédéric Cépède, Gilles Morin, Antoine Prost (dir.), *Le Parti socialiste entre Résistance et République*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2001, pp. 189–190.

[31] Jacques Duclos, "L'héritage de Guesde…", *Démocratie nouvelle*, mars 1966, p. 34.

devotion.[32] The man who had edited *l'Humanité* since 1918 fondly recalled the memory of his teacher: 'I have professed a profound admiration and attachment to this seductive teacher. I preserve his memory with just as much filial piety as that of my own father.'[33] We would search in vain for such a piece on Jaurès in the Communist press in this period.

At the peak of its glory, enjoying an influence as it would never again encounter, the Liberation-era PCF thus saluted Guesde as one of its most important precursors. There was similar respect—within different frameworks—running through the ranks of the SFIO. The front page of the 21 July 1949 issue of the party's weekly *Le Populaire dimanche* promoted the commemoration of Jean Jaurès and Jules Guesde. Two whole pages—written by Léon Blum—were devoted to the two SFIO founders. They were placed on an equal footing: he spoke of 'A shared doctrine among two men of different temperaments, cultures and age groups. And this shared doctrine has remained exactly, literally, our own.' The article was, indeed, entirely directed against those who would contrast the two men: 'To me this view … seems mistaken. The more I study our party's history, the more I am convinced that Guesde and Jaurès were infinitely more similar to one another than was believe in their own lifetimes—and doubtless, more than they themselves believed.'[34] The tactical dimension of this strict equality of treatment itself had to do with the battles within the SFIO: in the meantime Guy Mollet, armed with a Marxist rhetoric reminiscent of Guesde's own, as against Blum's more 'humanistic' orientation, had taken control of the SFIO. But while Blum was, at heart, a Jaurèsian and indeed a friend of the tribune for Carmaux, he was also well aware how much Guesde's shadow still hung over the party. Bracke was, in this period, Guy Mollet's 'mentor'—as historian Denis Lefebvre put it—up till his death in December 1955. To the end, Mollet would regularly consult his old comrade, who had been one of Guesde's most devoted supporters since 1886. In a preface to *Collectivisme et révolution*, upon the centenary of Guesde's birth Bracke underlined the historic importance of this figure,

> On 11 November 1945 the centenary of the birth of Jules Guesde should be commemorated not only in France but around the world, by all those who want to work for the triumph of socialism. … Through his eloquence

[32] Marcel Cachin, "Le centenaire de Guesde. 11 novembre 1945", *La Pensée*, 1945, p. 22.
[33] Ibid., p. 25.
[34] Léon Blum, 'Jean Jaurès et Jules Guesde', *Le Populaire dimanche*, 21 July 1949.

> and his writings, generations upon generations of wage earners, in all domains and in all fields of production, were called to rally under the banner of socialism and march forward.[35]

Bracke embodied the filial link with Guesde. Casimir Cépède—a zoologist and Guesdist socialist between 1903 and 1914 (joining the party in 1946)—recalled in November 1948 how during the liberation of Paris an American journalist had confused him for Guesde, on account of the physical resemblance between them: 'The reason for pride? … Mine? … as the spiritual son of Bracke … to have been called "Jules Guesde by an American, being no more than a new veteran, his disciple Cépède'.[36]

Other examples confirm this attachment. Pierre Herbaut, deputy general secretary of the SFIO and a Mollet ally, prefaced an edition of Bracke's memoirs on Guesde, as part of a collection revisiting all the party's pioneers entitled the 'pages of socialism'.[37] Mollet also regularly referred to Guesde, but showing his caution, he mostly mentioned him together with Jaurès.[38] In a 19 June 1949 talk in Hénin-Liétard (Pas-de-Calais) published as a pamphlet entitled *We Work for the Right Cause!*, a whole section was devoted to demonstrating that 'we are faithful to Jaurès and to Guesde'. Lastly—in continuity with the interwar period—the memory of Guesde was still strongly upheld in Le Nord. In 1957 the former minister Augustin Laurent—president of the *département*'s General Council and socialist mayor of Lille from 1955 to 1973—paid an emphatic tribute to the SFIO's guardian figures, considering them impossible to separate:

> Comrades, as someone who belongs to a Federation whose soil was deeply stirred by the trenchant ploughshare of Guesde's word, I confess that I cannot see, in the spiritual inheritance that Jules Guesde and Jean Jaurès have left us, how it would be possible to unbind the roles that each of them have in the common currency of French and international Socialism. I believe, moreover, that any attempt to do so would be as vain as to discriminate between Marx and Engels's contributions to scientific Socialism.[39]

[35] Bracke, preface to Jules Guesde, *Collectivisme et révolution*, Paris, Spartacus, 1949, p. 3.

[36] Institut Pasteur, service des archives, Fonds Casimir Cépède, Journal 208.

[37] Jules Guesde, *Une vie de militant: deux époques*, Paris, Librairie des municipalités, undated (probably early 1960s).

[38] Cited by Denis Lefebvre, *Socialisme et franc-maçonnerie, Le tournant du siècle (1880–1920)*, Paris, Bruno Leprince Éditeur, 2000, p. 129.

[39] Augustin Laurent, *Jules Guesde et Jean Jaurès. Deux grandes figures une même leçon*, Paris, Librairie des municipalités, 1957, p. 7.

Given all this, we should not be surprised to see that a few years later an analogy flourished between Guesdism and 'Molletism' (named after Guy Mollet) in a political context characterised by a profound mutation in the French Left. But before we go back to this, another striking development ought to be studied with some care: for forty years after his death, Guesde and his current began to become a genuine object of historical inquiry.

Between History and Politics

After the earlier outlines of such studies in the interwar period, it was in the USSR that the first historical work appeared that placed Guesde and Guesdism in a positive history. Signed by the historian I. B. Belkin, it was entitled *Jules Guesde and the Fight for a Workers' Party in France*. Published in Moscow in 1952, this book—marked by the *langue de bois* then prevalent in the USSR—nonetheless contains a mine of valuable information.[40] Continuing the tradition begun by Lukin's seminar in the interwar period, Victor Dalin—another Soviet historian later known for his works on the French Revolution—wrote a long article on the differences between Guesde and Lafargue. Based on numerous archival sources, it also rehabilitated the two men's role in the international socialist movement.[41] These works are mostly to be explained in terms of the ideological importance that the history of the workers' movement had in the USSR. But the richness and relative abundance of these works must also be understood in connection with the existence of a mass of archives on pre-1914 international socialism, recovered by the Soviets in the 1920s. These sometimes included rare and unpublished documents, and notably correspondence and manuscripts by French socialists.

But the turning point came from within France itself: the historian Claude Willard, born a few months before Guesde's death, published a major volume (the result of a doctoral thesis) on *Les guesdistes. Le mouvement socialiste en France (1893–1905)*. Published by the PCF's Éditions Sociales in 1965, this was the first sizeable scholarly work devoted to Guesde and above all to the implantation of his current before 1905, region by region. He based himself on a varied series of archives, most

[40] I. D. Belkin, *Jules Guesde and the Fight for a Workers' Party in France*, Moscow, 1952 (in Russian).

[41] Victor Daline, 'Le courant guesdiste était-il uni?', in Victor Daline, *Hommes et idées*, Moscou, Éditions du progrès, 1983, p. 171.

important of which was Guesde's private papers deposited at Amsterdam's International Institute for Social History (IISG). This rich archive was entrusted to the IISG for want of any viable solution within the Parti Socialiste's own structures. Founded in 1935 with the aid of an insurance company linked to Dutch social-democratic circles as well as the city of Amsterdam, the IISG became home to vast archives from the socialist movements persecuted in many European countries: for example, it received a good part of the archives of the pre-1933 German Social-Democratic Party. Guesde thus found himself in good company, side-by-side with his old comrades in struggle.

Indeed, with Willard, the Guesdists' history won its first proper recognition, in a context where the rules of historical scholarship were in the driving seat. Willard distanced himself from ideological approaches—an aspect of his work underlined by many other reviews and essays appearing in major historical journals. Meanwhile the young historian Michèle Perrot wrote her masters' dissertation on the newspaper variously titled *l'Égalité* or *Le Socialiste*. The history of the workers' movement had now got into university, and the Guesdists were among the first to be welcomed in as a subject of historical inquiry. This was also aided by the passing, contemporary to these studies, of two major representatives of militant memory—Bracke died in 1955, and Cachin three years later. History and memory also crossed paths in Willard's works—indeed, one of the major sources for his thesis was a series of in-person interviews with Marcel Cachin.

This scholarly work, which has remained an irreplaceable study, does however tend to analyse the Guesdist current by the yardstick of the later development of the PCF—a far more structured and coherent party.[42] In this same vein, the author continually denounced the Guesdists' 'errors'. It would also be naïve to see this work—of great rigour—as originating only from simple scholarly curiosity. As evidence of this we can note that, a few years later, this same historian published a selection of Guesde's texts—again with Éditions Sociales—in its 'People's Classics' collection. For the Communist publisher, appropriating the Guesdists' history—even if in a critical way—was a matter of far from secondary importance. The reaction from Maurice Thorez, PCF general secretary and one of the most visible figures in French political life, attests to this. In a private letter to Willard, Thorez wrote:

[42] Research on the PCF has since shown that this party was itself much more heterogeneous than Claude Willard imagined at the time. See in particular Roger Martelli, *L'empreinte communiste. PCF et société française (1920–2010)*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 2010.

> Dear Claude, I have read your work on Guesde. I find it excellent. You have shown very well the path Guesde had followed before he made his way to Marxism, and what of this always stayed with him, especially his incomprehension of the dialectic. Hence the 'doctrinaire' side of his peerless effort to make known Marx's ideas, and the sectarian aspects of the political positions he took in many fields. A sectarianism which, moreover, as you yourself indicate, arrived at or was mixed in with opportunism. But Guesde nonetheless remains the leading founder of the PO [Parti Ouvrier]. No one did more than him to show the workers of France the need for their own party; to defend and propagate the class conception which remains at the basis of our Party, the party of a new type.[43]

Conversely, there is no trace of any letter from the general secretary Madeleine Rebérioux, who in the same year edited a collection of Jaurès's texts *Against War and Colonial Policy* upon the centenary of his birth. Was this mere chance, linked to the heavy demands on the PCF's main leader's political diary? Was Rebérioux—excluded from the party ten years later in 1969—already suspected of deviation? Many hypotheses could be put forward, here. But the important thing is that Thorez—the man at the head of what was still the biggest party of the French left—continued to consider Guesde at least as much a guardian figure as Jaurès.

These works were published in a very particular political context: General de Gaulle's return to power in 1958, the emergence of a new anti-colonial left and a major episode in the unity of the Left, as the parties backed François Mitterrand as their joint candidate at the 1965 presidential election. Willard's work on one of the great currents of the history of the French left made an impression far beyond the circles of history enthusiasts. Tellingly, it was the object of a debate between several political figures published in the March 1966 issue of *Démocratie nouvelle*. This PCF-linked monthly, edited by Jacques Duclos, declared itself 'concerned to do ever more to assist the rallying-together of the French left'. The 'debate' section accommodated a long exchange—more than twenty pages long—between political figures and historians, including Willard himself, revolving around his thesis on the Guesdists. The list of participants in this debate is worth mentioning, here: there was Jean Bruhat, assistant professor at the Sorbonne, a loyal PCF man who had written many party textbooks and served as a historical commentator for

[43] AN, Archives Maurice Thorez. Letter from Maurice Thorez à Claude Willard, 29 April 1959, box 287.

l'Humanité; Jacques Duclos, one of the top leaders of the PCF and candidate in the 1969 presidential election, in which he took over 20 per cent of the vote; Mireille Osmin (daughter of Léon Osmin) who quit the SFIO to join in the creation of the Parti Socialiste Autonome in 1958 and then the Parti Socialiste Unifié (PSU) out of opposition to Mollet and his colonial policy; the PCF's Arthur Ramette, MP for Le Nord; Madeleine Rebérioux, at that time assistant professor the Sorbonne, who had published a Jaurès anthology with the PCF's own publisher; Jean-Jacques Piette, a young member of the SFIO leadership, an assistant to Guy Mollet and son to Jacques Piette, an important figure in the party and for a long time mayor of Hénin-Beaumont.

Each presented their viewpoint on the mark that the Roubaix MP had left. And even forty years after his death, this imprint still seemed to have some life in it. Willard himself attested to this, noting that, 'When I went to work at the Archives départementales du Nord for my thesis, I was able to interview several elderly Socialist militants in the Lille region who considered themselves Guesdists and boasted about this'.[44] The Communist participants reaffirmed Guesdism's positive legacy of 'organisation' and 'selflessness'. Jacques Duclos drew an equals sign between Jaurès and Guesde. He spoke of his exchanges with Marx Dormoy—son of Jean, father of Guesdism in l'Allier—and of course with Marcel Cachin, who had died a few years before this debate. Mireille Osmin, who had known Guesde via her father, expressed her great admiration for him: she set him in the long history of the Left's conquests, together with Paul Lafargue. According to Osmin, in affirming the 'right to be lazy' the Guesdists had heralded the gains won in May–June 1936: 'Léo Lagrange[45] who … was an indirect disciple of Jules Guesde became the executor of the Guesdists' will'.[46] For his part, Arthur Ramette offered a socio-historical reminder of the 'harshly exploited' workers of Le Nord among whom Guesde had appeared as 'intransigent'—in the good sense of the word. Jean-Jacques Piette adopted a more measured tone: he underlined the narrowness of the Guesdists' conception of partial gains and reforms, as compared to Jaurès's own.

[44] Claude Willard, 'L'héritage de Guesde…', *Démocratie nouvelle*, March 1966, p. 18.

[45] Léo Lagrange was undersecretary of state for sport and the organisation of leisure under the Popular Front.

[46] Ibid., p. 22.

Madeleine Rebérioux showed the greatest severity in this debate. She recalled the Guesdists' cunning for manoeuvre and highlighted their lack of interest for theory, as well as their growing distance from the popular aspirations of the pre-1914 period, especially the fight against war. The historian was even tougher when it came to their relationship with trade unionism, in her view bringing about a 'divorce between trade unionism and socialism which has remained a negative moment in the history of French society'.[47] She hammered home the point by referencing Deslinière's colonisation plan and Guesde's endorsement of it[48]: a legacy which this anti-colonial militant struggled to tolerate. This was also a veiled allusion to Mollet and 'Molletism'—she moreover emphasised 'difficulties in analysing the colonial phenomenon and the colonial people's struggle for independence'.[49] Three years later, she would be expelled from the PCF: her fall from grace had started with her positions on the anti-colonial struggle, which were adjudged to be excessive.

Rebérioux's chargesheet against Guesde reflected the sensibility of a new left, for which the Guesdists appeared responsible for the lack of analysis on the colonial question. Did this mean total rejection of Guesde and Guesdism? Things were not so simple: for while Piette emphasised that the SFIO youth had a cultural level far higher than at the beginning of the century—and for this reason could not share in Guesdism's rather unsophisticated and schematic political culture—he also acknowledged the indelible traces that these latter had left: 'from Guesdism they had preserved a sort of Party-worship', while 'a considerable number of young people … are still inspired by Guesdism when it comes to their attitude to the organisation—selflessness'.[50] The cult of the past remained decisive for the left-wing militants of the era: and whatever his narrowness, Guesde was seen as a man who had devoted himself heroically. As Piette concluded: 'Is it not by identifying with this history that one becomes a socialist?'

Up to the mid-1960s Guesde and the Guesdist current continued to be upheld by both the great parties, even if they were also subject to criticism. After underlining the Guesdists' many faults, Willard concluded his thesis with these words: 'He still impregnates the consciousness of many

[47] Ibid., p. 26.
[48] See Chapter Six, p. 132.
[49] Ibid., p. 25.
[50] Ibid. p. 35.

workers, especially in Le Nord; his heritage is still claimed, his flame kept alive, by both the PCF and the SFIO. He does indeed constitute a chapter, a great chapter of the book of the French working-class and socialist movement.'[51]

Continuing on from Willard's initiative, the Communist historiography had a certain place for the Guesdists into the 1970s. For instance, the historian Jacques Girault threw himself into works on Guesdism. In 1964 he defended a *Diplôme d'étude supérieur* thesis on 'Guesde and the Guesdists from 1905 to 1915' and in 1970 published a notable selection of Lafargue texts. In this same vein was the ambitious publishing project which reproduced *L'Égalité/Le Socialiste* in full, in twelve volumes. It was published by 'Hier et Demain', a publisher close to the Communists, with a critical apparatus put together by Willard and Girault. A brochure advertising this collection entitled 'The memory of the workers' movement', accompanied by a large portrait of Guesde, underlined the great interest of this collection for understanding the communist and socialist movement's long-term history, extending even into the present. The historical review founded at the PCF's initiative, *Les cahiers d'histoire de l'Institut Maurice Thorez*, regularly published contributions on the history of Guesde and the Guesdists, with an increasingly distant and scientific approach.[52]

A similar trend appeared among the socialists, with the creation of the Office Universitaire de Recherches Socialistes (OURS) at the initiative of Guy Mollet—the continuation of an idea of Bracke's which had never been put into effect. The OURS's review published Bracke's memoirs on Guesde in 1970 and then regular scholarly articles on this question.

The Stigmatisation of Guesde

But evaluations of Guesde were soon marked by a radical turning point. The 1966 debate in *Démocratie nouvelle* was, to our knowledge, the last time that there was any major exchange on Guesde, considered a respectable and respected founding father, anywhere in the activist press. Was this a swansong? At this same moment, the anti-colonial 'new left' was drawing an equals sign between Mollet and Guesde, and, indeed, built up a

[51] Claude Willard, *Le Mouvement socialiste en France (1893–1905). Les guesdistes*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 1965, p. 602.

[52] Jacques Julliard, art. cit.

black legend about this latter. Other than the continuities we have already underlined with regard to colonialism, the 'neo-Guesdists' of the SFIO were also characterised as sharing the same doctrinaire self-assurance, opportunism and even fetishism of an aged party. One of the new left's pre-eminent representatives, Jacques Julliard, led the charge, in an essay on Willard's thesis appearing in *Critique*:

> The politics of Mr. Guy Mollet, founded on the permanent alliance of verbal orthodoxy and opportunism in practice, can quite rightly claim Jules Guesde as its own—or, at the very least, the second Jules Guesde, following 1890.[53]

This accusation could be developed all the more easily given that after his eviction from the new Parti Socialiste led by François Mitterrand, Guy Mollet devoted himself to the OURS, considering himself the continuator of Guesde's loyal lieutenant Bracke. The association between Mollet and Guesde operated at full tilt in a tense political context[54] in which the question of how the Left could return to power was widely debated. Guesde was still cast in the role of a forerunner, but now mainly as a shameful one: Guesdism had perpetuated the flaws of Jacobinism and anticipated the Soviet system's slide into totalitarianism. The 'Second Left' regularly evoked Jules Guesde, making him the polemical foil par excellence. Backed up by robust but highly partisan historical arguments, in a scathing work Daniel Lindenberg reviewed what he called the Guesdists' 'untraceable Marxism'. Here, Guesde again occupied a choice position, but now as a figure of scorn. 'We understand the cause. Guesdism was but a workers' Jacobinism in search of doctrinal cover.'[55] Guesde became the link in the chain allowing for a continuum between Jacobinism, Guesdism, centralisation, Stalinism and so forth. The historical lines thus established are open to question, but this was formidably effective in polemical terms.

The grand finale of this reading—which became almost a new vulgate—was the intervention by Michel Rocard, political herald of the 'Second Left' that had joined the Parti Socialiste. This intervention came with his response to François Mitterrand (whose motion was expected to

[53] On these binary associations and their limits, see Frédéric Cépède and François Lafon, 'Guy Mollet, Albert Gazier, 1936-1946-1956-1966: itinéraires croisés au prisme de l'histoire socialiste', *Recherches socialistes*, nos. 74–75, January–June 2016, pp. 53–74.

[54] Frédéric Cépède et François Lafon, "Guy Mollet, Albert Gazier, 1936-1946-1956-1966: itinéraires croisés au prisme de l'histoire socialiste", *Recherches socialistes*, nos. 74–5, January–June 2016, pp. 53–74.

[55] Daniel Lindenberg, *Le marxisme introuvable*, Paris, 10/18, 1975, p. 135.

be in the majority) at the Nantes Congress in 1977. Adopting these same arguments at the PS's Metz Congress in 1979—and advancing further onto a historical plane—Rocard returned to the birth of French socialism, its unification and its twentieth-century development:

> Then came the birth of the united Party, and so again we get to Guesde and Jaurès. If Jules Guesde for his part contributed a tool, a concern, and a capacity for mass organisation which our two great federations still jealously and happily preserve, this same Jules Guesde also contributed to the Party a Marxism deformed by Lassalle and Trotsky, in the form of an ultra-centralised, statist vision of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which Lenin would aggravate yet further, completely forgetting that which I consider to be the true Marx, the Marx of socialism defined as an associative society, as the self-determination of the workers, as—you all know the words—the withering away of the state. It was Jaurès who, in this same moment, waged the dispute in the name of anti-Jacobin socialism, of decentralising, cooperative and mutualist socialism, in short, self-managed and perhaps the truly Marxist socialism.[56]

In response to this, Mitterrand's allies situated themselves as following in the tradition of Blum or Jaurès: as for the left wing of the party, Jean-Pierre Chevènement's CERES, it sought heterodox Marxist reference points and foregrounded important theorists: his partisans looked more longingly at the Communist Antonio Gramsci or the Social Democrat Otto Bauer than they did the early French Marxism.

The era in which Guesde was held up as a pioneer was coming to an end. Reviewing the history of the Second Left in 2007, Robert Chapuis situated this anti-Guesde stance within a long series of reference points drawn from the nineteenth century. He borrowed the same binaries outlined by Rocard:

> The Second Left, to put it in summary terms, preferred Proudhon to Marx, Jaurès to Guesde, Mendès France to Guy Mollet … and Rocard to Mitterand. It is sometimes accused of wanting to divide the Left even though unity is necessary to defeat the Right. Its nature is misunderstood: it is not a case of it preferring itself to the rest of the Left, but of making the proper space for an essential part of the socialist movement in France.[57]

[56] Cited by Vincent Chambarlhac, 'Les "deux cultures". L'histoire du socialisme dans l'affrontement partisan', *Contretemps*, no. 17, 1/2013, p. 24.

[57] Robert Chapuis, *Si Rocard avait su*, Paris, L'Harmattan, Le poing et les roses, 2007, p. 25.

Nonetheless, we should not go as far as to see nothing in this but the operation which a certain political current wanted to mount against the 'old left'. For the chargesheet against Guesdism should be set within a broader context. The 1960s saw an impressive ferment of ideas on the Left, which led to the flowering of many works and much thinking on Marxism. May 1968 confirmed and amplified this shift, before the spectacular reflux that came ten years later. Paradoxically, Guesde would pay the price for this renewal, for these more or less leftist new approaches abhorred the schematism of early French Marxism, judged guilty of all manner of evils. Louis Althusser pilloried these early Marxists for not having understood anything of *Capital*; those close to him wanted to break Marxism out of the torpor in which it had been immersed for decades.[58] Their main target was the 'revisionism' lurking over the PCF leadership, considered soft and reformist. But the origin of these ills was to be sought further back. The Guesdists were now drawn before the tribunal of history—so that they could be condemned. Narrow economism, the cult of the party, doublespeak: so many blemishes imputed to the former MP for Roubaix and his current.

Socialists and Communists: All Guesdists?

But could all the failings of the 'old left' be blamed on Guesdism? If we just turn to the analogies that crop up in Michel Rocard's speech, it is far from difficult to show how partial such a point of view really is. Political struggle is rarely accompanied by subtle framings of historical questioned—and in this case, the contrasts were emphasised to the extreme.

Can we say that Mollet's colonialism is mainly to be explained by the inheritance of Guesdism? Simplistic equivalences withstand little historical scrutiny: if we play along with such ideas, then the unity during the Popular Front would, for example, be chalked up as a Jaurèsian—far more than Guesdist—moment. Yet the great timidity—to say the least!—of the Popular Front on the colonial question stands in contrast with the boldness shown by Guesde in his final years, from 1908 to 1914. Similarly, in the late 1920s the PCF waged a dogged anti-colonial campaign, even though this had been a blindspot of Guesde and most of his partisans. Yet it was in this same period that the Communists' hostility to the bourgeois Republic and republican symbolisms made it most comparable to

[58] Louis Althusser et al., *Lire le Capital*, Paris, Maspero, 1965.

Guesdism. As a final example (and this is not an exhaustive response to this question) we could well ask whether, as Marc Angenot argues, we can consider Guesde 'the authentic and direct precursor of the PCF',[59] attributing him the role of a forerunner of Stalinism (purges, cult of personality and so on). It seems unarguable that Guesde did indeed leave an imprint—indeed, some would long identify themselves with it. But it also melded together with many other inheritances: for just like Guesde's history, the history of the PCF is also complex, made up of moments of sectarianism and unity, of bold forward moves and moments of retreat and so on. Would anyone claim that from 1918 to 1958 Cachin's *l'Humanité* was nothing but a purely 'Guesdist' publication?

It remains true that these criticisms—and this stigmatisation—of Guesde did foreground what undeniably were aspects of the Guesdist current. This was particularly true with regard to its weaknesses—from its distrust for theory to disinterest for the struggles of colonised peoples. Hence the force of these criticisms, notwithstanding their polemical aspect. But it seems just as easy to find direct lines of filiation that dismantle such claims. The negative identification of Molletism with Guesdism was itself the fruit of a very politicised history, linked to the context of the 1960s–1970s. It rather tended to exaggeration in blackening the name of a man and his current, whom it became convenient to blame for all of socialism's ills. This fit into a binary logic—giving structure to a certain vision of history—which portrayed a duel between Jaurès and Guesde of the kind adored by romanticising biographies. Yet all this undoubtedly sacrificed the complexity of real political processes.

Even so, what we could call the 'Rocardian-inspired' reading of Guesde would leave a lasting mark on writing about the history of socialism. Alain Bergounioux, a close collaborator of Rocard's and then, from 2000, president of the OURS, published a notable work of synthesis together with Gérard Grunberg in 2005.[60] Entitled *Ambition and Remorse. The French Socialists and Power*, this rich and well-documented work offered a similar line of interpretation, namely that of a socialism which had encountered the greatest of difficulties in freeing itself from the 'Marxist superego' of Guesdist origin. Here, Guesde became the emblem of the backwardness

[59] Marc Angenot, *Jules Guesde ou la fabrique du marxisme orthodoxe,* Montréal, Discours social, vol. 18, 2003, pp. 185–186.

[60] Alain Bergounioux and Gérard Grunberg, *Le long remords du pouvoir. Le Parti socialiste français 1905–1992*, Paris, Fayard, 1992.

of certain segments of the Left, indeed blamed for a French archaism imbuing socialist ranks into the present, which justifies the comfortable role of the dogmatic eternal oppositionist who never takes power. More recently, Grunberg has proposed that the 'aconstitutionalism' of the socialist tradition should be imputed to Marxism and in particular that inspired by Guesde, taken (more so than Jaurès) as the main doctrinal source for Blum, for example. In this view, the socialists stopped short of thinking about political representation in terms outside of the traditional instrumental readings.[61]

As for the Communist-leaning historiography, what rather more seems to have prevailed is a neglect of Guesde, except on rare occasions,[62] in favour of an exaltation of Jaurès alone. This left little place for those who disagreed, or his friends, in his own times.

Conclusion

Guesde in History

Guesde is thus no longer anything but a negative figure on the French left. At worst, he is associated with a deadly sectarianism and at best with a perfunctory ideology that masked far from honourable practices. For the radical left he is the dogmatist who then became a minister in the Union sacrée and rejected the Bolshevik revolution. For the governmental left, he embodies the intransigent ideologue who prevented the *aggiornamento* of the French left. And for all of them, his commitment to the antidreyfusard cause condemns him to the margins of militant memory.

Yet to turn a blind eye to the study of Guesde is to fail to understand the origins of Marxism in France—of whatever sensibility. The fundamental uniqueness of Guesde, as compared to the 'thousand Marxisms' of various different horizons—sometimes excessively intellectualised and coming from countries where Marxism has never constituted (or only marginally so) a reference point for any powerful political organisation—is that, for better or worse, he helped leave a lasting Marxist-inspired imprint on the

[61] Gérard Grunberg, *La loi et les prophètes. Les socialistes français et les institutions politiques*, Paris, CNRS, 2013.

[62] See for instance the biography by Andrée Collot, *Jules Guesde éducateur et organisateur du prolétariat*, Uzès, Inclinaison, 2010. Or, indeed, Pierre Ysmal, 'Actualité de Jules Guesde', *L'Humanité*, 24 May 2003.

French left. To forget him or to denigrate him by taking him out of context is to deny ourselves one of the keys to understanding more than a century of organised socialism. To say this is not to 'rehabilitate' Guesde—something that would make no sense given the structural political and social changes in the twenty-first-century France. Rather, it is an attempt to understand the impact of the various inheritances that have so enduringly moulded the political terrain. The few historians who have ventured into Guesdist territory since the 1970s do, all in all, take up this approach. As the historian Madeleine Rebérioux said in 1973—taking more of a distance than back in 1965—Guesde and his current embodied 'a rudimentary affirmation of class: the capitalist bourgeoisie and proletariat setting up camp in opposition to one another. There reigns a merciless war between these two enemy camps.'[63] This 'rudimentary affirmation' could be adopted and complexified by others without ever truly disappearing. Guesdism left its mark on the history of several regions: in the North, where 'it was indeed class consciousness and also class pride that grew with Guesdism' as well as in the South where to call oneself a Guesdist is to be further 'to the Left of the Left, in the good old republican tradition. A socialism which is socialist through inheritance—and no longer a socialism of rupture.'[64]

In a similar spirit, in the 1980s, Claude Willard published a series of documents and contributions on Guesde. Alongside a remarkable selection of texts collecting previously unpublished correspondence on the origins of the Parti Ouvrier, he published a brief biographical essay in 1991. Madeleine Rebérioux then Gilles Candar made space in the history of socialism for Guesde and the Guesdists, regularly housing contributions on this current in the *Bulletin de la société d'études jaurésiennes*, which then became *Cahiers Jaurès*. Outside of France, it is Robert Stuart—cited repeatedly in this present volume—who has offered one of the most accurate and suitably distanced views of this current. He first did so in *Marxism at Work* in 1992, and then in a 2006 survey of the Guesdists' approach to the national question, emphasising the ambiguity of their attitudes.

It is worth noting that Lafargue and his *Right to Be Lazy*—which is regularly republished—has better stood the test of time. The object of multiple essays, the memory of Guesdism is despite everything far more represented by Lafargue.[65]

[63] Madeleine Rebérioux, 'Le guesdisme (...)', p. 4.
[64] Ibid., p. 7.
[65] Paul Lafargue, *Paresse et révolution*, Paris, Tallandier, 2009.

A Discreet Memory

But the wave that swept across the memory of Guesde in the 1970s did not carry off everything. At the local and even regional levels Guesde remains a figure who—even if not well-known—can occasionally be cited, without any anathema against him. Throughout the twentieth century, many Socialist and Communist municipalities across France named a street after Jules Guesde—and in Le Nord often also public buildings, like the schools established in the 1920s. The communes of Paris's old '*banlieue rouge*' almost all have a Rue Guesde. All in all, we can count some 376 Rues, Boulevards, Places or Impasses Jules Guesde across France's territory; by way of comparison, this is, doubtless, far behind Jaurès (with over 2000 such locations named after him) but twice as many as Édouard Vaillant.[66] The statue in Guesde's honour in Roubaix is still standing.

Until relatively recently, Guesde's name was still well known among the Socialists in the Fédération du Nord. For instance, in the early 1980s it published an educational pamphlet where we can read:

> His knowledge of Marxism was rather summary, but he was able to draw out its basic principles and, most importantly, popularise them. Thus, through his texts and his speeches he spread the concepts of the class struggle and the collectivisation of the means of production. He insisted on the need for the organisation of the proletariat. … If through loyalty and selflessness he long remained intransigent, nonetheless he was later able to become an example of the spirit of unity. His lesson is still valuable for our present and our future: we have to be able to cultivate our differences even while carefully preserving our Unity, the foundation of our strength![67]

Guesde's portrait long had pride of place in the corridors of Le Nord's Socialist Federation. And on rare occasions he was still saluted, or more often, cited, even by socialists of the very highest level—on condition, that is, that he was limited to his regional dimension. Pierre Mauroy, a leading socialist in Le Nord and prime minister in François Mitterrand's government in 1981, regularly mentioned Guesde, even if he said he ultimately preferred Jaurès. Making no particular commentary on him, the former

[66] My thanks to Mr. Gilles Aymard of the Service National de l'Adresse (La Poste) for having provided me this information.

[67] Parti Socialiste-Fédération du Nord, *Quelques militants illustres dans l'histoire de la Fédération socialiste du Nord*, Commission fédérale formation, September 1982 (OURS).

Rocardian Manuel Valls—a prime minister under François Hollande's presidency, who could little be suspected of sympathies for Guesde—mentioned him in passing in a March 2016 Fête de la Rose in Wattrelos (within Guesde's own constituency):

> Le Nord is a land of solidarity; that which is born from the test of circumstance. A land of brotherhood; that which is born from great collective achievements. A land which has given the Left great figures: Jules Guesde and Roger Salengro, whose name this hall bears, Léo Lagrange and, of course, Pierre Mauroy![68]

It has not been possible to find any other recent occurrence of a nationally important political leader making a similar reference to Guesde.

Epilogue

'What a fine restitution of dogmatic energies!'[69]

In his 1945 essay *Utopia and Socialism* Martin Buber mounted the case against 'scientific socialism' for having buried socialism's original utopian dimension, indeed in lasting fashion. The context lent itself to this, at a time when an often very dogmatic 'Marxism-Leninism' was enjoying its moment of triumph. After this many theorists and historians followed Buber's line of argument. Falling into the same trap set by Engels in his *Socialism: Utopian Scientific*, for the most part they reasoned just like the man they intended to put to the sword. They rehabilitated utopia in opposition to science, just as previously science had unambiguously condemned utopia. One rigid definition followed another, as if its worthy heir.

In truth, at least up till the very end of the nineteenth century, even the hardest partisans of 'scientific socialism' activated the resources of utopia in their political propaganda, even as they dismissed it in words. One fine connoisseur of the political language of this period—and, moreover, one very critical of Guesdism, seeing it as a forerunner of Stalinism—is Marc Angenot. He aptly remarks that 'Guesde's Marxism is a *syncretism* of the social critiques and the prophesies on the future that came from the reformers of 1830 and 1848 and their epigones in the Empire, in which

[68] Speech reproduced in full at http://discours.vie-publique.fr/notices/163000855.html
[69] OURS, Manuscrits Marcel Sembat, 'Les guesdistes', no. 56.

Marx's "ideas" served as regulators making it possible to separate the wheat from the Proudhonian, Blanquist or communalist chaff'.[70] Robert Stuart, for his part, remarks that 'for the Parti Ouvrier the concentration of capital did not have the sole effect of mobilising the proletariat against capitalism but also that of building the infrastructure of utopia'.[71] Guesde's rather dry talks also contained—doubtless, in a very specific way—a utopia which appears to have been a mobilising force. Many contemporaries who knew Guesde report that the fascination surrounding him came from his ability to tell of the coming of a better world. Thus his rigid scientism was able to make several generations of socialist and communist militants dream, despite the split of 1920. Ultimately—and paradoxically—trenchant characterisations do not manage to grasp a man who so often used them himself.

Later from 1936 and 1945, some of the social conquests that had now become reality could appear as one of his legacies. Thus in 1966 Mireille Osmin could say of Guesde that 'even though the revolution has not taken place, some of his vistas on the future have become reality'.[72] Does that mean that Guesde still has a legacy even for our own time? Wherever people advocate a break with capitalism, where the vocabulary of the class struggle still has a place, in short, wherever the 'Marxist superego' has not been buried, it seems that Guesde has left a deeper trace than things might otherwise suggest. His shadow even today looms over the clashes at the congresses of those organisations that still officially identify with socialism. Without Guesde, and in particular without the social and political dynamism of a current that he embodied over several decades, the French—and perhaps even international—left would probably have not travelled down the same paths.

In this lies his grandeur—and his importance to history.

[70] Marc Angenot, *Jules Guesde ou la fabrique du marxisme orthodoxe,* Montréal, Discours social, vol. 18, 2003, p. 143.

[71] Robert Stuart, *Marxism at Work. Ideology, Class and French Socialism during the Third Republic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 123–124.

[72] Mireille Osmin, 'L'héritage de Guesde', *Démocratie nouvelle*, March 1966, p. 22.

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There is a rich collection of 'Jules Guesde Papers' at Amsterdam's International Institute of Social History (IISG). It features an abundance of correspondence, press cuttings, manuscripts, and documents from Guesde's election campaigns or connected to his parliamentary activity. This is the most important archival collection for research on Guesde. Since late 2015 the full set of documents has been digitised. The IISG is also brimming with personal collections for socialist leaders from Guesde's era; the most important include those of Wilhelm Liebknecht, Karl Kautsky and, indeed, Bracke—collections which we have ourselves worked through.

Another part of Guesde's correspondence was long in the possession of Jean-Marie Guesde. Unfortunately, we were unable to find any trace of this collection, despite our best efforts.

Gabriel Deville's archive at the Institut Français d'Histoire Sociale (now at the Archives Nationales) and the Maurice Dommanget collection also include some interesting pointers.

Other Useful Collections Include

– The recently rediscovered Paul Lafargue papers at the PCF's archives (Archives Départementales de Seine-Saint-Denis, Bobigny)
– The Marcel Sembat papers contain an interesting critical manuscript on the Guesdists (Office Universitaire de recherches socialistes, OURS)

The OURS conserves not only a very rich set of pamphlets from Guesde's era, but also further collections on Guesde allowing for the study of his legacy (notably the documents on the Amis de Guesde in the René Hug papers).

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– The papers of Charles Dumas, Guesde's chief of staff when he became a minister in 1914. They are held at the Institut d'histoire Sociale founded by Boris Souvarine (Nanterre, Conseil Général des Hauts-de-Seine)
– The papers of the 1930–1964 PCF general secretary, Maurice Thorez, whose own roots were in Le Nord, contain some interesting documents on the memory of Guesde.

The police and surveillance archives are very rich. They especially concern the activity of the Guesdist current (see the list compiled by Claude Willard, *Les guesdistes*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 1965, p. 669–671). A specific surveillance dossier dedicated to Jules Guesde (AN F7/15965) includes numerous reports on his various activities as well as press cuttings; as far as we know, no one before us had made use of this dossier.

The *départemental* archives for Le Nord and the municipal archives for Roubaix contain an important body of documentation allowing us to study Guesde's implantation in this region, especially by way of the press, electoral propaganda and structures linked to the POF and then the SFIO. Also worth noting is the recent availability at the *départemental* archives—thanks to the efforts of Mrs. Martine Pottrain—of the collection from the Parti Socialiste's Fédération du Nord. Documentation on the pre-1922 period is relatively limited, yet also valuable.

Finally, a few complementary materials can be found at Moscow's RGASPI (formerly the Institute of Marxism-Leninism). The rich Marx-Engels collection contains numerous unpublished letters which the two men received (notably from the German émigré Karl Hirsch), providing valuable information on the first steps taken by the French socialist movement.

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We have also made occasional use of the regional press, as indicated by Claude Willard, especially for Le Nord.

As for German sources, the two initiatives for publishing the works of Marx and Engels are useful for the earlier period of Guesde's activity: namely, the *Marx-Engels Werke* and the *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)*. Numerous pieces of correspondence between Engels and the German social-democrats include appreciations of Guesde: see, for example, the recently published volume *Briefwechsel. Oktober 1889 bis November 1890*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2013. Several older volumes of correspondence are also very useful, such as Eduard Bernstein, *Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Engels*, Assen, Van Gorcum, 1970.

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